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THE THING

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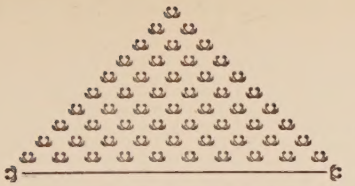
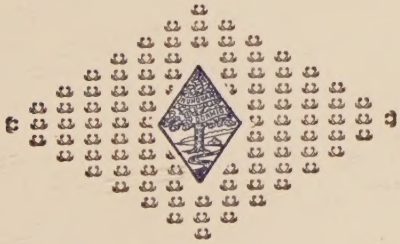


FERENC MOLNAR

THE PLAY'S THE THING

Adapted from the Hungarian
By P. G. WODEHOUSE



BRENTANO'S
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On Thursday, October twenty-first, 1926, at Irving M. Lesser's Great Neck Playhouse, Great Neck, Long Island, the Charles Frohman Company, Gilbert Miller, Managing Director, presented Holbrook Blinn in THE PLAY'S THE THING by Ferenc Molnar, for the first time on any stage in any language. The play was presented for the first time in New York City under the same auspices at Henry Miller's Theatre on Wednesday, November the third, 1926. It was produced by Holbrook Blinn with the following cast:—

SANDOR TURAI	Holbrook Blinn
MÀNSKY	Hubert Druce
ALBERT ADAM	Edward Crandall
ILONA SZABO	Catherine Dale Owen
ALMADY	Reginald Owen
JOHANN DWORNITSCHEK	Ralph Nairn
MELL	Claud Allister
LACKEYS	Stephen Kendal John Gerard

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THE PLAY'S THE THING

THE CHARACTERS

SANDOR TURAI, A Famous Dramatist
MANSKY, His Collaborator
ALBERT ADAM, A Young Composer
ILONA SZABO, A Prima Donna
ALMADY, A Leading Actor
JOHANN DWORNITSCHEK, A Footman
MELL, The Count's Secretary
TWO LACKEYS.

The action takes place in a room in a castle on the Italian Riviera, on a Saturday in summer.

ACT I—2:00 A. M.
ACT II—6:00 A. M.
ACT III—7:30 P.M.

THE PLAY'S THE THING

ACT ONE

As the curtain rises a distant orchestra is heard playing Leoncavallo's "Mattinata." The stage is almost dark. The only light comes through two large French windows at the back. Through them we see the moonlit Mediterranean far below, the vague outlines of the precipitous coast, twinkling lights along quays and esplanades, and here and there the faint glow from some lighted window. A lighthouse blinks intermittently in the far distance. Within the dark room three darker shadows loom against the moonlit windows; the lighted ends of three cigarettes prick the blackness. There is a long pause. It is almost embarrassingly long. Just before one wonders if anything is ever going to happen a man's voice breaks the silence.

THE MAN'S VOICE. When you stop talking, Sandor, for sixty consecutive seconds, there's something wrong.

[*One of the shadowy forms is seen to rise and cross to the right wall. We hear the click of an electric switch and instantly the stage is flooded*

with the warm glow of several electric sconces and candelabra lamps. The light reveals a room beautifully furnished in Italian Renaissance. At the back one shallow step leads up to a raised portion which runs the whole width of the room. Behind it are the French windows, now closed, with a balcony beyond them. To the right a short flight of steps leads to a landing and a door to a bedroom suite. To the left one step leads up to a door to the hall and the remainder of the castle. Occupying the right wall of the lower portion of the room is a great fire-place with a corbelled chimney. A long table stands near it. At the left is a grand piano. Below the piano in the left wall is a door to another bedroom. All these doors are closed. Above the piano toward the center is a small stand with a telephone on it. There are comfortable chairs here and there. The ceiling is beamed and carved. The whole room reflects wealth and beauty.

The speaker, who has just lighted the room, is a large and portly man of middle age. His name is Mansky. *He is in a dinner jacket, as are his two companions,* Sandor Turai *seated in the center, and* Albert Adam *near the piano.* Turai *is also middle aged, but younger-looking and less portly than* Mansky. *A glance shows him to be a man of consequence and dynamic personality. He is wearing a monocle.* Albert

Adam is a dreamy, handsome boy just over the threshold of manhood. The distant orchestra has stopped playing. Mansky *reseats himself to the right of* Turai, *and speaks again.*]

What's on your mind, Sandor?

TURAI. I was just thinking how extraordinarily difficult it is to begin a play. The eternal problem of how to introduce your principal characters.

ADAM. I suppose it must be hard.

TURAI. It is—devilish hard. Up goes the curtain, there is a hush all over the theatre, people come on the stage. Then what? It's an eternity—sometimes as much as a quarter of an hour before the audience finds out who's who and what they are all up to.

MANSKY. I never saw such a fellow. Can't you forget the theatre for a single minute?

TURAI. No. That's why I'm such a great dramatist.

MANSKY. You can't be happy for half an hour unless you're talking shop. Life isn't all theatre.

TURAI. Yes, it is—if you write plays. You know what Alphonse Daudet says in his Memoirs? When he stood by his father's death-bed, all he could think of was what a wonderful scene it would make for the stage.

MANSKY. It's silly to let your job become an obsession.

TURAI. Well, that's the theatre. Either you master it or it masters you. And of all the brain-racking things in the world, beginning a play is the worst. That's where your technique comes in, my boy. Take this scene here, for instance. We three—Curtain goes up on three ordinary men in ordinary dinner jackets. How is anybody to know even that this room we're sitting in is a room in a castle? And how are they to know who we are? If this were a play we would have to start jabbering about a lot of thoroughly uninteresting things until the audience gradually found out who we were.

MANSKY. Well? Why not?

TURAI. Think how much simpler it would be if we were to cut out all that stuff and just introduce ourselves? [*He rises and addresses the audience.*] Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. We three arrived to-night to spend a couple of weeks at this castle. We've just left the dining-room where we did ourselves remarkably well with some excellent champagne. My name is Sandor Turai. I am a playwright. I have been a playwright for thirty years. I make a very good thing of it. I bow and step back leaving the stage to you.

[Turai *steps back and* Mansky *steps forward and addresses the audience.*]

MANSKY. Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Mansky—I, too, am a playwright, and this gentleman's life-long collaborator. We are probably the best-known firm in the business.

TURAI. Come to Mansky and Turai for all comedies, farces and operettas. Satisfaction guaranteed.

MANSKY. I, too, make a very good thing out of it.

TURAI. Which brings us—

MANSKY. —to the remaining member of the trio.

[*They indicate* ADAM *who rises and addresses the audience in similar fashion but with more diffidence and none of their assurance.*]

ADAM. The last *and* least. I, ladies and gentlemen, am Albert Adam. I am twenty-five years old and I compose music.

TURAI. Very good music, too.

ADAM. I have done the score for the latest operetta by these two kind gentlemen. My first effort. They discovered me. They got me invited to this castle. Regardless of expense, they bought me a complete wardrobe. Without them I am a complete non-entity. I have no parents, no reputation, and no money.

TURAI. But—you're young.

MANSKY. And gifted.

ADAM. And in love with the prima donna.

TURAI. Don't bother to tell them that. An audience takes it for granted that the young composer is in love with the prima donna. It's tradition.

ADAM. Thank heaven.

TURAI. [*Again addressing the audience.*] Isn't that the simplest way to begin a play?

MANSKY. Very crude. If that were all there was to it, any fool could write plays.

TURAI. A great many do. But you see how absurdly easy it is— All you have to do is—

MANSKY. All right, all right, all right. For heaven's sake, stop talking shop. I've had enough. Save it for to-morrow.

TURAI. Perhaps you're right. Yes, it's a treat to get a couple of hours off for a change. Wonderful, that trip in the car— Italy! . . . And here we are, free at last from the stuffy world of behind the scenes, out of the reach of thin-skinned actors and thick-skinned managers. All the year I've looked forward to these two weeks. A princely host and a house full of smart people—just what men like ourselves need to inspire us. And, mark this, my friends, nothing to worry about—for our job is done. [*He goes to the window, opens it, steps on*

to the balcony and speaks from there.] The operetta is finished and off our minds. And, moreover, it is summer. The weather is perfect, the night is gorgeous, the sea—is the sea, and the dinner was good. [*He comes back into the room.*] Yes, we must remember it. It's been a great day. August the 20th.

MANSKY. Friday.

TURAI. What of it?

MANSKY. I wish it wasn't.

TURAI. Don't be such an old woman!

MANSKY. No one ought to arrive anywhere on a Friday.

ADAM. [*Dreamily.*] What difference does it make—Friday, Saturday, Sunday—Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter—life's always wonderful.

TURAI. [*Crosses to* ADAM.] *My* unlucky day is Tuesday. Among other things—[*To* MANSKY.] you were born on a Tuesday.

MANSKY. Well, look at it for yourself. Here's to-day's little bag of bad luck. San Martino—mid-day—violent thunderstorm followed by blow-out. Set us back an hour. Fiero—early afternoon—ran over dog, surrounded by angry multitude, had to scatter money to every one in sight to keep from get-

ting mobbed. More delay, and we reach here at ten instead of eight. Friday. And when we arrive, who is out? Our princely host. Who else? Everybody. All gone off on a picnic. Friday. And the beautiful, the one and only, the most vitally important member of the whole house party—our adorable prima donna—where is she? Also off on a picnic. Is she expected home to-night? No. When *is* she expected? No one knows. Friday.

TURAI. Oh, she'll be back.

MANSKY. Well, that won't spoil Friday's record, because it's Saturday now.

ADAM. And I've got to wait a whole night before I see her. It's cruel.

MANSKY. Just Friday.

TURAI. Well, now listen to *me*. I'll give you *my* version of the day's proceedings. Friday, San Martino—mid-day—capital luncheon including some really drinkable coffee. During the meal, a few passing drops of rain. Result: perfect roads—no dust. Fiero—early afternoon— Injured a dog and for a while it looked as though the populace were about to injure *us*. But our Friday good luck held. The dog made a miraculous recovery and when last seen was sitting up and taking nourishment. And a few insignificant coins, judi-

ciously distributed, made the populace our friends for life. To resume. We arrived here some hours late, but—what a bit of luck *that* was. Everybody away, nobody in the house to expect tired men to make conversation. Furthermore we dine on a picturesque terrace of a wonderful old Italian castle and are given as fine a curried chicken as I ever tasted.

MANSKY. I loathe curry.

TURAI. And in conclusion, let me tell you the crowning piece of good fortune of this magical Friday. [*He indicates the door to the bedroom at left.*] The next room to this is Ilona's.

ADAM. What!

TURAI. Yes, through that door is the room of the beautiful, the one and only. And having a pull with the butler, I managed to get this suite for ourselves. There's luck for you.

MANSKY. For him.

TURAI. And for us. We profit indirectly. When a composer is happy he writes song-hits. When a prima donna is happy, she stops singing off the key. And the librettists gather royalties from the resulting triumph.

MANSKY. Sordid brute. You've no poetry in your soul.

TURAI. But I have a balance in my bank—much more satisfactory. As for Ilona being away, that's good luck too. Think of the pleasant surprise she will get. It is night. The little darling comes home from her picnic. All unsuspecting, she goes to her little room, sinks upon her little bed—

MANSKY. Why on earth must everything always be so little?

TURAI. Why not?

MANSKY. Damned sentimentalism. I know the house well. She has a *huge* room and an *enormous* bed.

TURAI. Immaterial. Quite immaterial. The point is that she comes home, all unsuspecting. She doesn't know we're here. [Adam *who has been sitting dreamily at the piano begins playing softly.*] She doesn't know we've brought the finished operetta with us. She doesn't know I'm going to sing her the waltz song from Act Two—

MANSKY. God help her!

TURAI. . . . the world-famous waltz—[Mansky *looks at him skeptically*] at least, it's not world-famous yet, but it's bound to become so . . . anyway, the ravishing theme-waltz upon which this infant genius has poured out all the treasure of his love-bewitched soul . . .

[Adam *stops playing.*]

MANSKY. Be quiet—never praise a composer. It unsettles him. [*Rises. Looks at watch.*] Do you know it's after three—I have been thinking and I've got an idea.

TURAI. Beginner's luck.

MANSKY. Let's go to bed. You can do any singing you want to-morrow. If they're not home yet, it means they're staying out all night. I know the ways of this house. We've been up since five and I'm all in. Three hundred miles are chasing themselves through my head. As for your infant genius with the love-bewitched soul, he's asleep already.

ADAM. [*Who has been nodding over the piano, awakens with a start.*] I'm not.

TURAI. I've no objection to postponing the surprise-party. Suppose we *wake* her with the waltz.

ADAM. If only she doesn't find out before.

TURAI. That's all right. I particularly told my friend the butler that nobody must know of our arrival till to-morrow morning. The butler is a very important man. He practically runs this house.

ADAM. [*Rising.*] Then I'm going to take a bath.

TURAI. I don't follow your logic. What has the importance of the butler to do with taking baths?

ADAM. I hate logic. [*Starts toward the door at right, but stops to gaze out of the window.*]

TURAI. Do you really intend to bathe at this hour?

ADAM. Yes.

TURAI. In the sea?

ADAM. [*Stands by balcony door.*] No. In the tub. [*The sound of a distant orchestra is heard playing Toselli's Serenade.*] When you're tired and sleepy and looking forward to something particularly nice, it's wonderful to lie in luke-warm water with your eyes closed.

TURAI. Hear! Hear! [*Sits in large arm-chair.*] Well— Do as you please, infant. When an artist is working he must pamper himself. [*To* Mansky.] You have to humor these composers. Did you ever know his grandmother?

MANSKY. I had not that pleasure.

TURAI. [Adam *comes down the steps and sits down again.*] She brought him up when his parents died. She was about *so* high. The littlest old woman I ever saw in my life.

ADAM. Tiny, wasn't she?

TURAI. And the very opposite of this dreamy boy.

Always hustling, always on the go. It's her fault that our young friend here has always remained such an unsophisticated babe. She not only mothered him—she smothered him with her love. She was like a little witch in a fairy-tale guarding hidden treasure. I'll never forget the day she brought him to me, for the first time.

ADAM. My goodness, I was scared that day.

TURAI. So was I. This little half-portion of a woman fixed me with blazing eyes and fairly hissed: "This boy is a *genius*. You *must* hear his *work*." [*Pensively.*] His mother was a gentle, beautiful woman.

ADAM. I hardly remember her.

TURAI. I can see her—very clearly—*still*. . . . [*He rises and goes to* ADAM *whom he pats affectionately on the shoulder.*] Ah, well, you're going to escape the struggles most young artists have before they reach the top. No wasting of time and brain and nerve-energy for you. You've got a very clever man behind you, pushing you on.

[*Music stops.*]

MANSKY. [*Significantly.*] *Two* clever men.

TURAI. Two? [*Laughs.*] Ah, yes, of course, two. [*To* ADAM.] So run away and have your bath and sleep and dream and love and enjoy this beautiful world

and all that there is in it. Happiness will make your music all the sweeter.

MANSKY. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, encouraging him to be a dreamer. He should be learning by this time that life isn't all music and roses and happiness.

TURAI. Why be in such a hurry to teach him that?

MANSKY. I'm not in a hurry.

TURAI. Then why must he be in a hurry to learn it?

ADAM. [*Who has run up the steps at right, pauses at the door.*] This is my room, eh?

TURAI. Whose else could it be? Have you forgotten who is sleeping or about to be sleeping on the other side of that wall? [*He indicates the left wall.*]

ADAM. I should say I haven't.

TURAI. It's rather a good situation. Lovers—and separated by a wall. Like Pyramus and Thisbe. What is that speech of Pyramus's? [*Speaking to the left wall.*]

"And thou, oh wall, oh sweet, oh lovely wall!
Oh wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss!"

MANSKY. [*Impatiently.*] Shop again! Always shop!

ADAM. And what about you two?

TURAI. We're all right. Our room is on the other side of yours.

ADAM. Are you sharing a room?

TURAI. We have to. Real collaborators never separate for a moment, or the most priceless ideas might be lost forever. Besides, I talk in my sleep. I'm told that's when I say some of my best things. Mansky is a light sleeper, and he wakes up and jots them down. [MANSKY *rises indignantly.*]

ADAM. I think I'm going to like this place. Well, gentlemen, before I go, one last word. I am very fond of both of you. I am finding life very beautiful. And I am very happy. [ADAM *goes out. Once again the distant orchestra is heard. This time playing the Brise Argentine.*]

TURAI. Which startling utterance seems to call for a glass of very old brandy. [*He crosses to the bell rope on left wall and pulls it.*]

MANSKY. Make it two.

TURAI. It's nice to see the boy so happy. Now I'm on the shady side of fifty, I find myself full of parental affection and nobody to lavish it on. [*Reflectively.*] Yes . . . his mother was a gentle, beautiful woman. [*He goes up to window, and*

looks down the cliff.] They're still dancing down there on the hotel terrace. With spot-lights on the dancers. With that dark blue sky in the background and the coloured lights on the water, that wouldn't make a bad setting for a first act finale. [Mansky *who has just taken a cigarette from his case, snaps it shut with irritation.*] Yes, I'm coming to think the boy's right and life is beautiful.

MANSKY. Sandor.

TURAI. Yes?

MANSKY. I didn't like to tell you before, though it really belongs to Friday, too.

TURAI. Tell me what?

MANSKY. [*Sits on bench with the unconscious relish of the confirmed pessimist.*] Something rather unpleasant. A little piece of news. Rather unpleasant. [*The music has stopped.* Turai *who has been at the window, turns toward* Mansky.]

TURAI. You're a queer chap. Just when a man's feeling happy for five minutes you have to come along and take the joy out of life.

MANSKY. It concerns you, too. It's rather unpleasant.

TURAI. [*Going to* Mansky—*speaks ironically.*]

Well, come on, old friend. Ruin my evening. What is it?

MANSKY. I was looking in the visitors' book downstairs, and I saw a certain name. [*Puffs cigarette.*] Yes, it's rather unpleasant.

TURAI. Don't sit there, making my flesh creep. What name did you see in the visitors' book?

MANSKY. Almady.

TURAI. The actor?

MANSKY. Yes.

TURAI. He's here?

MANSKY. He is.

TURAI. H'm. This *is*, as you say, rather unpleasant.

MANSKY. You realize what this means?

TURAI. It means that you're thoroughly happy.

MANSKY. Not at all. I may be a pessimist, but unfortunately I'm a tender-hearted pessimist. When I am proved right, I do not enjoy the fact. The fact is that Mr. Almady is here.

TURAI. But how? Why? He hasn't been invited here for ten years. I always understood he spent his

summers with his wife and children at Lake Balaton.

MANSKY. I suppose he fished for an invitation. He probably had his reasons.

TURAI. Does our young friend know anything about that business?

MANSKY. He hasn't an inkling of the part Mr. Almady has played in his fiancée's life.

TURAI. Well, hang it all, it wasn't so much of a part. What does it amount to? When she was starting on the stage he gave her lessons in voice production. And then—well, it was just the usual business—the romantic leading actor and the little pupil. The sort of thing that lasts a couple of months at the outside. And, besides, it was all over and done with long ago.

MANSKY. Apparently it is *not* over and done with.

TURAI. Rot! Because by *pure* chance he happens to be in the same house?

MANSKY. It isn't pure chance. It's impure intention. Use your intelligence, man. Ilona was Almady's discovery—he taught her all she knows.

TURAI. That's a thing of the past. Ilona's intelligent. She's in love and she's engaged to be married. And you know how whole-heartedly, how pas-

sionately, an actress can be engaged when she *is* engaged to be married. I'm bound to say I'm not remarkably enthusiastic about this match, but if it makes the boy happy that's the main thing. My dear chap, you're crazy. She wouldn't be such a fool . . . with a worn-out elderly actor—a father of a family—with four children. She's got too much sense.

MANSKY. I never said a word about that. I merely said I had seen his name in the visitors' book. That means he is staying here. Is that pleasant? No. It is unpleasant. That was all I said. I now say something more. We *ought* to have *wired* Ilona that we were coming to-night.

TURAI. I admit it. You're right again. So be happy. Never surprise a woman. Always wire her in plenty of time. On several occasions in a longish life I have prepared a joyful surprise for a woman, and every time I was the one surprised. The telegraph was invented for no other purpose than that women should not get surprises. [*There is a knock at the door left.*] Come in. [*A footman enters from the hall. He is an elderly man in blue livery.*] What do you want?

FOOTMAN. What do *you* want, sir? You rang, sir.

TURAI. Oh, yes. Cognac.

FOOTMAN. Any particular brand, sir?

TURAI. [*To* MANSKY.] Do me a favor, old man, and go up and keep Albert talking for a few minutes. I want to have a few words with this fellow.

MANSKY. Don't drink both the brandies. [MANSKY *goes out through door at right.*]

TURAI. What's your name?

FOOTMAN. Mine, sir?

TURAI. Yes, yours.

FOOTMAN. Johann Dwornitschek, sir.

TURAI. Johann?

FOOTMAN. Dwornitschek.

TURAI. Ah— Age?

DWORNITSCHEK. Fifty-two, sir.

TURAI. Born?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir.

TURAI. I should have said, where were you born?

DWORNITSCHEK. Podmokly. In Tcheko-Slovakia, sir.

TURAI. Nice place?

DWORNITSCHEK. No, sir.

TURAI. Ah—married?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir, thank you, sir.

TURAI. Wife living?

DWORNITSCHEK. Well, in a sense. . . . She ran away with a soldier two years ago, sir—thank you, sir.

TURAI. Don't thank me—thank the soldier. You're new here, I think?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir.

TURAI. When did you come?

DWORNITSCHEK. Last summer, sir.

TURAI. Thank you.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank *you*, sir.

TURAI. No, no. Thank *you*. You've answered my questions most patiently.

DWORNITSCHEK. Excuse me, sir, would it be taking a liberty if I enquired why? . . .

TURAI. Why I have asked those questions? Not at all. You'll find that out later on. But don't alarm yourself. I'm not a detective. Now—Johann Dwornitschek. Here are more questions. That room next door there is Miss Ilona Szabo's? [*He indicates the door at left to bedroom.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir.

TURAI. Has she been gone long?

DWORNITSCHEK. I have not seen her come in, sir.

TURAI. Did you see her go out?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. They left at six o'clock this afternoon.

TURAI. They? Who?

DWORNITSCHEK. The entire house-party, sir, including the master. They were going to San Pietro, I think, sir.

TURAI. Is that far?

DWORNITSCHEK. The yacht would take them there in about an hour and a half. Twenty-six persons in all, sir. Supper served on board. A nice cold collation, sir.

TURAI. When do you expect them back?

DWORNITSCHEK. Well, sir—they took a considerable quantity of liquor with them.

TURAI. The question I asked was "When do you expect them back?"

DWORNITSCHEK. That is the question I'm answering, sir. Hardly before to-morrow morning at the earliest.

TURAI. I see. Who's in the party?

DWORNITSCHEK. The core or center of it, if I may use the expression, sir . . .

TURAI. Certainly you may use the expression. It's a beautiful expression.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank you, sir. The core or center of it is an American family, distant relatives of the master. Every time a holiday comes around, they insist on a picnic.

TURAI. What holiday is to-day?

DWORNITSCHEK. I don't know, sir. They have two every week here. They always go off at night in the big yacht. They're quite wild about the young lady. She sings for them on the yacht. With the gypsy band.

TURAI. Oh, they have gypsies, too?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. Four pieces. From the Hotel. But they're not much good. No— A gypsy's not at his best, sir, on the water. Gypsies need *solid* ground.

TURAI. Solid ground—yes, of course. Well, passing over the subject of gypsies for a moment, if you don't mind—

DWORNITSCHEK. Oh, no, sir.

TURAI. Well, then lightly passing over the subject of gypsies, do you know a Mr. Almady?

DWORNITSCHEK. Oh yes, indeed, sir. I know Mr. Almady. I know Mr. Almady very well. He has been here three days.

TURAI. Here in the castle?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. In the old wing facing the park.

TURAI. That would be on this floor?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir, on this floor.

TURAI. And—he's one of the yachting party, you say?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir, along with the young lady.

TURAI. What do you mean, *along* with the young lady?

DWORNITSCHEK. Well, sir, he escorted her to the boat. They're—you might say—sort of partners.

TURAI. How partners?

DWORNITSCHEK. I mean, sir—well, working together —like—like—as it were, partners.

TURAI. I see. You mean partners.

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. Partners. Mr. Almady gives recitations on the boat.

TURAI. How do you know that?

DWORNITSCHEK. They took me with them, sir, last Tuesday.

TURAI. Tuesday? It would be Tuesday.

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir—Tuesday.

TURAI. All right—Thank you. . . .

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank *you*, sir. Will that be all, sir?

TURAI. Yes, that will be all.

DWORNITSCHEK. Excuse me, sir, but you said that I would find out later on . . .

TURAI. Why I began by asking you all those personal questions.

DWORNITSCHEK. Exactly, sir.

TURAI. Quite simple. It's a little matter of psychology. When you want a man to speak the truth, begin by making him tell you all about himself. It gives him a feeling of responsibility and makes him afraid to lie, later on. That's from a detective-play by Mansky and Turai. You can take the tip as some slight return for your trouble.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank you very much, sir.

TURAI. Don't mention it.

DWORNITSCHEK. And which shall I bring you, sir?

TURAI. Which? What which?

DWORNITSCHEK. Which brand of cognac?

TURAI. Which brands have you?

DWORNITSCHEK. All the best brands, sir. Hennessey, Three Star Martel, Biscuit, Dubouche, Rivière—Gardrat. . . . [*A door is heard to slam somewhere at left.*] Excuse me, sir. I rather think . . . if you would be good enough to remain quite quiet for just one moment . . . I rather fancy that's the young lady coming back now. [*They listen. From the adjoining room at the left a soprano voice is heard singing casually but clearly a well-known aria from an operetta.*] Yes, sir. That's the young lady all right.

TURAI. [*Going up toward the door at right.*] It is. It's she. Splendid. Then never mind the cognac. *Champagne* is clearly indicated. My favorite brand—Mumm's Cordon Rouge. See that it's iced and hurry it along. Look sharp, man!

DWORNITSCHEK. You wish it here—sir?

TURAI. [*Going out at right.*] Of course. Of course.

DWORNITSCHEK. Very good, sir. [*Exit* DWORNITSCHEK. *He goes out through the door at left to the hall. The singing grows louder.*]

TURAI'S VOICE. [*In the room at right.*] Hey! Stop that bath. You haven't time for baths now. She's back! Sh! Hurry up. Quick, both of you. [*The voices of* MANSKY *and* ADAM *are also heard.*] I tell you she *is*. She's in her room. Do be quick. I've ordered champagne. Here, I'll help you dress. [*The door at the right is closed from the outside. From inside the adjoining room on the left the singing continues until interrupted by* ALMADY'S VOICE *raised in protest.*]

ALMADY'S VOICE. What do you mean by this singing? I believe you're doing it just to annoy me. [*She trills a few notes.*] You're trying to torture me.

ILONA'S VOICE. Well—it's pretty cool to come walking into my bedroom at this hour.

ALMADY'S VOICE. I came with you.

ILONA'S VOICE. Now, listen. Everything's over and ended. I've put you out of my life forever. I'm engaged to be married and I intend to be a good little wife. You've no right to behave like this.

ALMADY'S VOICE. No right? I, who made you? I, with whom you have lived so many hours of madness—wonderful, unforgettable—

ILONA'S VOICE. Not unforgettable at all. Watch how quickly *I'm* going to forget them. Do go away, and leave me alone. Don't touch me. [*A pause.*]

Stop. I won't let you kiss me. Can't you understand my fiancé will be arriving any day now?

ALMADY'S VOICE. I'll kill him.

ILONA'S VOICE. You'll do nothing of the kind. [ALMADY *sobs loudly.*] Oh, stop *crying!* The idea—a grown-up man, the father of a family, with four children.

ALMADY'S VOICE. But I love you so, Ilona. And you throw me over for another man. Don't you love me—still—just a little?

ILONA'S VOICE. You're nothing but a great big baby. Cheer up, do. That's better. All right, then, you *may* kiss me. [*A pause while they kiss.*] What are you doing? Don't take off your coat.

ALMADY'S VOICE. I must. I want to say goodbye.

ILONA'S VOICE. Well, you don't need to say it in your shirt-sleeves. [*Pause.*] *Now* run away and let me get some sleep. I'm worn out.

ALMADY'S VOICE. I'm only waiting till you're in bed. Is there anything to drink here?

ILONA'S VOICE. You'll find it in the ante-room. Take the whole bottle if you want to—but *go.* [*Pause. Shouting.*] Look on the sideboard. And stay where you are till I've got my nightie on. Don't

come *in* and don't *look*. [*There is a silence during which the door right is opened and* TURAI, ADAM, *and* MANSKY *tiptoe in like three mischievous boys. They speak in whispers as they cross to the door to* ILONA'S *bedroom.*]

TURAI. Hush! She's gone to bed.

ADAM. Do you think she's asleep already?

TURAI. I doubt it. Come on. Faces to the wall as close as you can get. [*They group themselves in a row as near the wall as the furniture will permit.*]

TURAI. [*Whispers.*] Ready? Now . . . Ilona, Ilona, Ilona . . . take the time from me. [*Raises his hand like a conductor; at the same moment* ALMADY'S *voice is heard.*]

ALMADY'S VOICE. I worship you—I adore you. [*The three are riveted where they stand, transfixed with amazement.*]

ILONA'S VOICE. Are you starting all over again?

ALMADY'S VOICE. Yes, I am. All over again. I love you as the church steeple loves the cloud that settles above it and floats away with the first passing breeze. I can't go on living without you. Not a week, not a day, not an hour. [*The three men turn simultaneously.*]

ILONA'S VOICE. [*contemptuously.*] Just words.

ALMADY'S VOICE. It's the truth. I'm crazy about you. And you—you've used me up and squeezed me like a lemon, and now you want to throw me away.

ILONA'S VOICE. I don't want to throw you away, silly. Where's the sense in raving like this? Oh, come on, then. Come here and let me kiss your beautiful classic brow.

ADAM. She said—did you hear what she said?

ALMADY'S VOICE. That's not a kiss—that's a tip—Nothing but a paltry tip.

MANSKY. [*Sinks into chair.*]

ILONA'S VOICE. Don't shout like that.

ALMADY'S VOICE. I will shout. I'm a squeezed lemon. That's what I am—[*Sobs.*] A lemon! The whole world shall know that I'm a lemon.

ILONA'S VOICE. Get off your knees. And, oh, please, do stop crying. I can't bear it. You know how fond I am of you. [TURAI *and* MANSKY *clap their hands to their heads.* ADAM *collapses on the piano stool.*]

ALMADY'S VOICE. Those nights of love—those flaming wonderful nights! Have you forgotten them so completely?

ADAM. [*Looking up.*] That's Almady.

MANSKY. You can't be sure.

TURAI. [*Turns to* MANSKY.] Don't be an ass. Don't try to deceive a musician about a voice? There's no use talking—the thing's a tragedy and we've got to face it.

MANSKY. Friday!

ILONA'S VOICE. Stop! Control yourself.

ALMADY'S VOICE. You ask me to control myself—when I look at *that*—at that perfect shape. The rose flush of that skin.

ILONA'S VOICE. Hands off!

ALMADY'S VOICE. My God! How round it is! How smooth, how velvety—and how fragrant. [*A pause.*]

ILONA'S VOICE. Don't bite!

ALMADY'S VOICE. I must—I am *so hungry.* . . .

TURAI. [*To* ADAM *and patting him on the shoulder.*] I think you had better go, old man. Go and turn in in our room.

ADAM. [*Bitterly.*] And I thought she was a Madonna. Holding her in his arms—stroking— [*rising in sudden fury and rushing to the door.*] God, I could kill him!

TURAI. [*Restraining him.*] Steady, old man, steady. [ADAM *covers his ears with his hands.*]

ALMADY'S VOICE. Ah, well! I see I am nothing to you any more.

ILONA'S VOICE. Oh, for goodness sake. I swear that no man has ever meant so much to me as you. From the top of your head to the soles of your feet you are a *man!* Who should know that better than I?

TURAI. Come, come, my boy—let's get out of this.

MANSKY. [*Goes to* ADAM.] Come on, old chap. You're going to sleep in our room. [TURAI *and* MANSKY *lead him to stairway.*]

ADAM. Sleep! [*He goes out at right.* TURAI *and* MANSKY *are on the landing.*]

ILONA'S VOICE. Oh! Don't look so pathetic . . . Well, come here—kiss me.

MANSKY. I was right— We ought to have sent a telegram. [*He goes out at right.* TURAI *comes down to table, lights a cigarette and sits on edge of table.*]

ALMADY'S VOICE. I want you to remember that kiss forever.

ILONA'S VOICE. It was your old kiss. Sweet and burning—like hot punch. But do be a dear and go away now. It was mad of you to come here. If my fiancé ever hears of this I'll kill myself. Oh, damn my idiotic sentimentality for getting me into this mess. You must leave here to-morrow on the first train. He'll be here any day now. [TURAI *shifts uneasily.*] Everyday I've been expecting a telegram. [TURAI *groans.*] Get out, I tell you, get out!

ALMADY'S VOICE. If you insist, dear heart, so be it! Your word is law. I am going to bed now. Farewell, dear heart. But grant me one last kiss.

TURAI. [*To himself.*] Damn all fools who don't know when they've had enough.

ILONA'S VOICE. Go *now*—

ALMADY'S VOICE. So be it. Good-night, dear heart.

ILONA'S VOICE. Good-night, you baby. [*Silence. A door is heard closing.*]

TURAI. [*To himself.*] *At last!* Good-night, dear heart! [*After a moment he sits down in arm-chair. Pause.* MANSKY *re-enters.*]

MANSKY. [*With a gesture of inquiry toward* ILONA'S *room.*] This silence—what does it mean?

TURAI. This silence is a highly moral silence. The baritone hero has departed. And the fair heroine has deposited herself in bed.

MANSKY. After depositing *us* in the worst mess in my whole experience. Wasn't it awful?

TURAI. Awful!

MANSKY. Smooth, round, fragrant! And he wanted to bi— oh, my God! [*He sits.*]

TURAI. Ten minutes ago we were three happy men. That poor boy! How is he?

MANSKY. I got him to bed. Poor little Pyramus. A jolly wall, that, isn't it? Church Steeple! Lemon! The damned fool.

TURAI. I can't look him in the face. That little old grandmother of his—she'd let me have it with her broomstick if she were here.

MANSKY. It's certainly the most appalling mess. You got it through your pull with the butler! Marvelous luck! Pyramus and Thisbe! "Oh sweet wall!" Well, I hope you're satisfied!

TURAI. Oh, go to the devil.

MANSKY. I don't want to be unkind, but whichever way you look at it you're to blame for this catastrophe. Why the deuce was it necessary to put the

boy next door to his lady-love? Friendship *is* friendship, but there are limits.

TURAI. I was merely trying to be sympathetic and helpful. I meant well.

MANSKY. Never mean "well." It's fatal. See what's happened as a result. Bride gone—love gone—waltz gone—operetta gone. All a total loss. On the other hand, the dog didn't die and the coffee *was good.* Well, Friday has certainly made a nice clean, efficient job of it *this* time!

TURAI. I'm only thinking about that boy.

MANSKY. And I'm also thinking about our operetta. The lady kissed the lemon's classic brow. After this, can you see her playing the part?

TURAI. Do stop jabbering about that side of it. I'm only interested in the boy. Did he say anything?

MANSKY. Plenty. I wish I hadn't heard it.

TURAI. What *did* he say?

MANSKY. One of his remarks was "I'll tear up the score and kill Ilona." The round and fragrant one. And the problem that presents itself to me is this: if he tears up his music and kills the prima donna, what sort of a *first night* shall we have?

TURAI. [*Thinks a moment, then with emphasis.*] We'll have a first night. I promise you that.

MANSKY. What, after all this?

TURAI. Yes, after all *this*. Don't worry, we'll have a first night all right.

MANSKY. With that music?

TURAI. With that music and that composer and that prima donna. And I'll tell you some other things. We'll have a hit, a wedding, and a happy ending.

MANSKY. Well, of all the optimists! It's just a suggestion, but wouldn't it be a good idea if you were to mention just what you propose to *do*. This is where Sandor Turai, famous for his happy endings, had better try to surpass himself. [*Turns toward stairs.*] Get busy, my play-writing genius, and let's see how good you are.

TURAI. One can but do one's best. [MANSKY *goes out at right. A clock in the hall is heard to strike four.* TURAI *takes a blank sheet of music from the piano. He paces up and down in deep thought, occasionally glancing toward* ILONA'S *room. He jots down a few words.* MANSKY *re-enters.*] Well, how is he?

MANSKY. Lying in bed, staring at the ceiling. That's bad. He didn't even answer my question.

TURAI. What did you ask him?

MANSKY. I said: [*Plaintively.*] "Feeling better now?"

TURAI. What did you expect him to answer to a damn fool question like that?

MANSKY. Well, have *you* solved the problem?

TURAI. If I have I'm not going to tell you. You've ruined enough good ideas of mine already with your collaboration. This time I mean to work alone. Without a partner. [*Goes to table. Sits on bench.*] All I ask of you is a little information. There are a few *facts* I require.

MANSKY. [*Huffily.*] That's all I'm good for, is it?

TURAI. That's all. Where are Almady's wife and family now?

MANSKY. At Lake Balaton, I believe.

TURAI. Lake Balaton. Address?

MANSKY. Verona Cottage.

TURAI. [*Putting it down.*] Verona Cottage. What's Ilona's mother's name?

MANSKY. Adele,—Alma, something.

TURAI. Well, it begins with an A?

MANSKY. Yes, I know that.

TURAI. Thank God! Mrs. A. Szabo. What's her address?

MANSKY. 70 Elizabeth Avenue, Fured.

TURAI. Would she be there now?

MANSKY. [*Petulantly.*] Oh God! How should I know? But, listen— [*Points to* Ilona's *room.*] My own humble suggestion would be to wake her up now and have a little chat.

TURAI. What about?

MANSKY. [*Starting across.*] I'll rout her out. [*Goes left.*]

TURAI. [*Excitedly.*] For heaven's sake, no! The only thing a woman can do is deny everything. What could she deny? Could she unsay those words of hers? Gloss over that mad sensual outburst? Explain her half-hearted resistance? Of course, she might point out that it was nice of her to forbid the man to bite. No, I can't quite see where denials come in.

MANSKY. Women have lots of other tricks. Falling on their knees—fainting—bursting into tears—laughing hysterically—or just going *rigid* all over.

TURAI. That might be good enough for you or me. When you're a middle-aged dramatist, you wel-

come a chance to do the noble, forgiving business. It's good theatre. But that boy in there is twenty-five and he isn't a dramatist. So think again.

MANSKY. [*Collapsing hopelessly in armchair.*] Then there's no solution to the problem.

TURAI. There's a solution to everything—one has only to find it.

MANSKY. By Jove! Rather a good line, that.

TURAI. Not bad. Jot it down. [MANSKY *does so, on his cuff.*] And now the most important thing is —be very tactful and understanding with the boy. Sit by his bed till he falls asleep.

MANSKY. He won't sleep to-night.

TURAI. Give him something to make him . . . he must have sleep. To-morrow's going to be a big day. One false move and he will be the center of a record scandal. It would break his heart. And on his peace of mind depends . . .

MANSKY. Our success. Capacity business. A year's run.

TURAI. Beastly words.

MANSKY. And yet only yesterday—how beautiful they sounded!

TURAI. Go away. I'll take on this job. [*Rises.*] Leave

everything to me, and base your confidence on past experience. Which shows the moment *you* stop trying to help me, I can solve anything.

MANSKY. [*Bows stiffly and turns toward stairs.*] Thank you, my dear fellow.

TURAI. Not at all.

MANSKY. Good-night.

TURAI. Good-night. See you to-morrow. Till then, don't leave him for an instant. That's official. I've enjoyed our little talk so much. Good-night.

MANSKY. Good-night. [*Goes out at right.* Turai *goes to table, sits and jots down some more notes. There is a knock at door left to hall.*]

TURAI. Come in. [Dwornitschek *enters with cooler and champagne, four glasses on a tray.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. The champagne, sir. Mumm's Cordon Rouge—just as you ordered.

TURAI. [*Motioning it away.*] 'M yes. But that was a long time ago. A very long time ago. Since then the world has changed quite a good deal. However, the motto of the Turais is "Never refuse champagne," so put it down. [Dwornitschek *places tray on the table and the cooler on the floor.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. Will four glasses be sufficient, sir?

TURAI. Three more than sufficient. [DWORNITSCHEK *leaves one glass on the tray before* TURAI, *he places the other three on the table. There is a pause.* TURAI *stares at him.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. Something in the expression of your eye, sir, tells me that you are trying to remember my name.

TURAI. Quite right. What is it?

DWORNITSCHEK. Dwornitschek, sir.

TURAI. Still Dwornitschek? Well, well! All right, Dwornitschek, you can go to bed.

DWORNITSCHEK. At what hour would you desire breakfast, sir?

TURAI. What time is it now?—

DWORNITSCHEK. Quarter past four, sir.—

TURAI. Then let us say at seven—or perhaps six.

DWORNITSCHEK. Anything special that you fancy, sir?

TURAI. [*In offhand way.*] No. Just ham, eggs, cold chicken, smoked salmon, cold beef, bacon, butter, milk, honey, jam, rolls and tea.

DWORNITSCHEK. With lemon?

TURAI. [*Shouts with revulsion.*] No! [*Quietly.*] No —with rum.

DWORNITSCHEK. [*Starts to go.*] Very good, sir. At six precisely.

TURAI. Tell me, Dwornitschek, when do you sleep?

DWORNITSCHEK. In the winter, sir.

TURAI. What are you waiting for?

DWORNITSCHEK. I was wondering if there were any more questions you desired to ask me, sir.

TURAI. No, thank you.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank *you*, sir.

TURAI. No, no, thank YOU.

DWORNITSCHEK. I love being asked questions, sir. It shows that gentlemen take an interest.

TURAI. You mean in Dwornitschek, the man? As opposed to Dwornitschek, the servant?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. You are sure you have nothing more to ask, sir? It would be a treat for me.

TURAI. Nothing more, thanks. My stock of knowledge for to-day is complete. I wish it weren't.

DWORNITSCHEK. Then I will bid you good-night, sir. [*Starts to go.*]

TURAI. Good-night. . . . One moment! There is one other thing. Where is the writing paper? And I'd like some telegraph blanks too. And ink, and also a pen.

DWORNITSCHEK. The writing materials are in the library, sir, but I can bring them to you here. [*Starts to go.*]

TURAI. Don't bother. I'll do my writing in the library. It's a good idea. No chance of being interrupted. [*Rises and goes up the first step.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. I'll go and turn on the lights, sir.

TURAI. One moment. [*Points to champagne.*] That —can come too.

DWORNITSCHEK. Very good, sir. [*Takes cooler and one glass.*]

TURAI. [*Pausing.*] After you.

DWORNITSCHEK. Oh no, sir.

TURAI. My dear Dwornitschek, I insist. You're sure that really *is* your name?

DWORNITSCHEK. Oh yes, sir.

TURAI. I only wondered. Thank you.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank *you*, sir.

TURAI. No, no. Thank YOU. [DWORNITSCHEK *goes out.* TURAI *puffs his cigarette, gazes for a moment at the wall of* ILONA'S *room, sighs and then goes out at left as the curtain falls.*]

ACT TWO

As the curtain rises a clock in the hall is heard to strike six. Golden sunlight pours in the windows. The Mediterranean is as blue as tradition has painted it. SANDOR TURAI, *now jauntily attired in white flannels is seated in the armchair at the center, with the loose leaves of a manuscript before him. As the clock stops striking, the door at left to the hall is opened by* DWORNITSCHEK, *who comes down to* TURAI, *bringing a newspaper on a salver.* DWORNITSCHEK *is followed by two lackeys in livery, each carrying an enormous silver tray piled high with* TURAI'S *breakfast. During the dialogue that follows, the lackeys place the breakfast upon the long table at the right. This done, one of them stands at attention while the other goes up to the window, opens it, steps out on the balcony and lowers an awning which shuts off some of the now too brilliant sunlight.*

DWORNITSCHEK. Good morning, sir.

TURAI. Good morning. What's this?

DWORNITSCHEK. Morning paper, sir.

TURAI. You've read it, of course?

DWORNITSCHEK. Oh yes, sir.

TURAI. Anything about me in it?

DWORNITSCHEK. No, sir.

TURAI. Then take it away.

[DWORNITSCHEK *gives salver with the newspaper to one of the lackeys and motions both off.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. Let me see, sir, I *think* it was ham, eggs, cold chicken, smoked salmon, cold beef, bacon, butter, milk, honey, jam and rolls that you ordered, was it not?

TURAI. Quite right.

DWORNITSCHEK. And tea with lemon.

TURAI. [*With revulsion.*] Not lemon!

DWORNITSCHEK. There's rum, sir—or cognac, if you prefer.

TURAI. Pardon my emotion—I loathe lemons.

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. Many people do. I had an aunt—

TURAI. Suppose we don't talk about your aunt just for the moment.

DWORNITSCHEK. Very good, sir.

TURAI. Later on, perhaps.

DWORNITSCHEK. At any time that suits *you*, sir.

TURAI. You must make allowances for the artistic temperament. When I have been sitting up all night writing, I somehow don't feel in the vein for discussing other people's aunts. You understand, don't you?

DWORNITSCHEK. I quite understand, sir.

[TURAI *has risen and crossed to the table, upon which he has put the manuscript. He now goes round to the right side where his place is set, he examines the breakfast with evident satisfaction. He lifts the covers from several silver dishes, looks at their contents with pleasure, and smiles at* DWORNITSCHEK *with approval.*]

TURAI. You're really a wonderful fellow. How on earth did you manage not to forget anything?

DWORNITSCHEK. It was a labour of love, sir. My heart is in that breakfast.

TURAI. [*Sitting down.*] Your heart, *too?* [*After he has taken a sip of tea.*] Ah! that puts new life into a man.

DWORNITSCHEK. You must have had very little sleep, sir.

TURAI. Not much.

DWORNITSCHEK. I hadn't any.

TURAI. Yes, I remember you told me you were essentially a hibernating animal.

DWORNITSCHEK. Nobody else is stirring as yet. This is the time when I sometimes manage to lie down myself for a few moments.

TURAI. Then you will get some sleep, after all?

DWORNITSCHEK. Just forty winks, sir. That's the advantage of being by the sea. Gentlemen stay in bed till noon. Very different from the mountains.

TURAI. [*Who throughout this dialogue is eating and drinking with relish and satisfaction.*] They get up early in the mountains, eh?

DWORNITSCHEK. At about five or four-thirty. They like to go climbing. But there's always a bright side, sir; they go to bed at nine.

TURAI. You know, you're broadening my mind tremendously. Every time I see you, I learn something new.

DWORNITSCHEK. If it's not a liberty, sir, I should like to say something.

TURAI. I'll bet it's something good. Go on.

DWORNITSCHEK. You ought to take more care of your health, sir. You don't get enough sleep.

TURAI. *I* don't?!

DWORNITSCHEK. And you smoke too much, sir. I found at least fifty cigarette-butts in the ash-tray in the library.

TURAI. Wrong. Thirty-seven.

DWORNITSCHEK. Too many, sir.

TURAI. What's your daily allowance?

DWORNITSCHEK. Fifteen, sir.

TURAI. You'll live to be a hundred.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank you—is that a medical opinion, sir?

TURAI. No—just a hope. This weary world needs men like you.

DWORNITSCHEK. No, no, sir. Like *you*.

TURAI. Well, shall we say like both of us?

DWORNITSCHEK. Would it be a liberty, sir, if I expressed the opinion that you have a heart of gold?

TURAI. Not at all. Thank you very much.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank *you*, sir.

TURAI. No, no. Thank YOU.

DWORNITSCHEK. It's the way you take an interest

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that touches a man, sir. I wish there was something I could do for *you.*

TURAI. At the moment, I think the best thing you can do for me is to leave me alone. And if anyone asks for me, tell them I'm sleeping and must not be disturbed. Understand?

DWORNITSCHEK. Oh, yes, indeed, sir.

[DWORNITSCHEK *starts to exit.* TURAI *stops him.* TURAI *pantomimes* "Wait a minute. I must remember your name." *He registers despair.* DWORNITSCHEK *smiles indulgently and whispers* "Dwornitschek."]

TURAI. Thank you.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank *you*, sir.

[*He goes out at the left to hall.*]

[TURAI *rises, listens at staircase, then goes to the telephone and takes up the receiver.*]

TURAI. Hello. Will you give me Miss Ilona Szabo's room?

[*He waits. Telephone bell rings loudly in the room at the left. After a pause it rings again.*]

ILONA'S VOICE. [*Sleepily.*] YES???

TURAI. [*Speaks into telephone, very mildly.*] Hello.

ILONA'S VOICE. HELLO!!!

TURAI. [*Softly.*] Hello.

ILONA'S VOICE. WHO'S THAT?

TURAI. The unfeeling brute who has aroused you from your slumber is known to the police as Sandor Turai.

ILONA'S VOICE. [*Changing in a flash, delighted.*] Sandor! Dear old Sandor!

TURAI. Well, and how's the prima donna?

ILONA'S VOICE. Where are you speaking from?

TURAI. Next door.

ILONA'S VOICE. What!

TURAI. I thought you'd be surprised. I'm in the next room.

ILONA'S VOICE. How on earth? . . .

TURAI. My dear little Ilona, let's postpone the explanations. I want to see you at once—immediately.

ILONA'S VOICE. [*Anxiously.*] You're frightening me. What is it?

TURAI. [*Deliberately puts down the receiver and speaks toward the wall.*] Don't get alarmed. [*Lights cigarette at piano.*] Come in here at once. This minute.

ILONA'S VOICE. This minute?

TURAI. This very minute. [*Taps door at left.*] Open this door. Put something on.

ILONA'S VOICE. What?

TURAI. Anything you have.

ILONA'S VOICE. Do what? I can't hear. There must be something wrong with the telephone.

TURAI. [*Goes to the wall.*] Put something on and come in here at once. Can you hear better now?

ILONA'S VOICE. Yes, I can hear beautifully now.

TURAI. Good.

ILONA'S VOICE. I'll be right in. [TURAI *goes back to the telephone and hangs up the receiver. There is a short pause. Then the door at left to bedroom is thrown open and* ILONA SZABO *enters. She is an extraordinarily beautiful, blonde young woman. Having just got out of bed and slipped a flimsy alluring negligee over her nightie, she is somewhat dishevelled. Her golden hair is awry. Moreover she is, at the moment, more than anxious, her apprehension and fright are close to panic.*] Sandor—what is it? I feel something terrible has happened. What's the matter? When did you get here?

TURAI. [*Calmly.*] Sit down, my dear. You and I have got to do some quick talking.

ILONA. But what's *happened?* For heaven's sake, tell me!

TURAI. Sit down.

ILONA. Why?

TURAI. Because if you don't sit down now, you'll sit down later on when you hear what I've got to say —and you'll sit down *hard.* Better do it gracefully while you can.

[*He pushes her gently into the armchair at center.*]

ILONA. I don't understand.

TURAI. You will. My dear little Ilona, in spite of the fact that you are engaged to my young friend Adam, you are still carrying on an affair with Mr. Almady.

ILONA. [*With indignation.*] It's an outrageous lie.

TURAI. Good! I thought you were going to say it was none of my business.

ILONA. I couldn't say that, because you're Albert's guardian, guide, philosopher and friend and God knows what else. And you're a friend of *mine* and

write plays for me. So I simply say that it's a lie.

TURAI. I'm glad you do, because it's an observation which I can answer. I've been in this room since last night and the walls in this new wing are as thin as paper.

ILONA. [*Looks at walls. As the truth dawns upon her she is horrified.*] Good God!

TURAI. Lemon. [ILONA *hides her face.*] Lemon. . . . Church steeple. Well, dear Ilona. Suppose we talk this over? Something's got to be done—and done quickly.

ILONA. If you heard, you heard what *I* said too.

TURAI. Every word.

ILONA. Then you know that I told him to get out—and he's *getting* out to-day. At twelve o'clock. So, if you don't say anything—and of course you won't . . .

TURAI. Not quite so fast, please. If the thing were as simple as that, you would never have known from me that I had overheard you. I regret to say matters are much more unpleasant.

ILONA. [*Sinking back in chair.*] My God! You don't mean? . . .

TURAI. I see you've guessed.

ILONA. Did—did— I can't say it.

TURAI. I will say it for you. Yes, the boy *did* hear it, too.

ILONA. [*Looks at* TURAI.] God! . . . He's *here* then?

TURAI. He is here.

ILONA. Where?

TURAI. Sh! He's up in Mansky's room—asleep. And last night he was in this room—awake.

ILONA. [*Rises, goes toward her room.*] I'll take veronal, all there is in my bottle.

TURAI. That's not enough.

ILONA. [*Turns.*] Ten ounces.

TURAI. I was not referring to the veronal. I mean suicide is no solution.

ILONA. There isn't any solution that I could survive. [*Dramatically.*] There are only two things I can possibly do—kill myself or deny the whole story.

TURAI. Deny the whole story? Do you suppose if it were just a question of telling lies, I would have troubled you? I'd have told them myself long ago.

ILONA. Then we come back to the veronal.

TURAI. Exactly. We come back to the veronal—and find it safely tucked away in its bottle.

ILONA. Well, what *do* you suggest?

TURAI. I have my plan. And all I ask of you is not to hinder it.

ILONA. [*Almost crying.*] You know I worship Albert. If anybody knows that, you do. I've been a different woman since I met him. He looks on me as a saint. [TURAI *gives her a quick ironic glance.*] And he's right. I *have* turned into a saint since I began to love him. It was the only thing I wanted to do in life—to keep straight for his sake. I was so happy. [*She sinks into armchair crying.*] I love him so.

TURAI. And yet you can't be true to him.

ILONA. [*Indignantly.*] You've no right to say that. It was nothing but my damned sentimentality. You know very well that affair with that beast Almady didn't last a couple of months. First he gave me breathing lessons and taught me how to throw my voice—

TURAI. [*With a significant glance.*] Yes, he taught you that, all right.

ILONA. I'm just a victim of my kind heart. I thought I was rid of him, but he got himself invited here.

And he's always bursting into tears. A woman hates to see a man cry. He stuck to me like a leech. [*Rises and stalks about hysterically.*] But why on earth would I want to start in with him again? I give you my word, Sandor, that last night was simply—like the last dying vibrations of a high note.

TURAI. You'd have done better to stop vibrating a little earlier. Still, there it is. What we've got to do now is—get you out of the mess.

ILONA. [*Runs across to* TURAI *and throws herself on her knees, clasping him beseechingly.*] Sandor! Sandor darling! Do you really think you *can?*

TURAI. Yes, I can. But don't think I'm doing it for your sake, my dear; not for the sake of your beautiful eyes. You deserve to be drawn and quartered. I'm doing it for that poor decent boy who still retains a few ideals in this unpleasant world. Yes, my dear Ilona, I think I must ask you to be a little ashamed of yourself.

ILONA. [*Bitterly.*] Don't worry. [*Rises.*] I am. What can I do?

TURAI. [*Goes to telephone.*] I am just going to tell you. And you won't enjoy it. Still, good medicine's rarely pleasant. [*Picks up receiver.*] Hello. [*To* ILONA.] What's the number of Almady's room?

ILONA. [*Apprehensively.*] What do you want with him?

TURAI. [*Into the telephone.*] Give me Mr. Almady's room, please. [*Pause.*] Never mind about all that, my good man. I don't care what instructions he left—call him. And go on ringing till he answers. It's a matter of life and death.

ILONA. What are you doing?

TURAI. [*In telephone.*] Mr. Almady? Yes, yes, I know you gave instructions. . . . Will you please be quiet for a moment? . . . This is Sandor Turai speaking. Here in the new wing. . . . Last night, by car. . . . Good morning—you were awake already! Capital! Would you mind coming here at once. Room number four. . . . Yes, I mean NOW, right away. . . . Yes, matter of life and death was what I said, but I made a slight error. I should have said a matter of death—Yes, yes, this very minute—right. [*He hangs up the receiver.* ILONA *starts to go.*] Where are you off to?

ILONA. If Almady is coming here? . . .

TURAI. You will kindly stay just where you were.

ILONA. [*Looking toward* ALBERT'S *bedroom at right, crying.*] He looked on me as a saint. He thought

I was everything that was fine and pure. He called me his Madonna.

TURAI. You should have thought of that a long time ago.

ILONA. Tell me—what did Albert say?

TURAI. I wouldn't ask that if I were you.

ILONA. God! What was the plan you said you had? . . . Can't you speak?

TURAI. Patience.

ILONA. It's too cruel. . . . Just because I hate hurting people's feelings . . . [*She breaks off as a knock sounds on the door left to hall.*]

TURAI. Come in.

[ALMADY, *who enters is also in a state of nervous apprehension. He is attired in elaborate, not to say loud, house pajamas. A tall and but recently handsome man, now well into middle age.* ALMADY *is first, last and always the actor. He dramatizes every moment of his existence. He does not walk, he struts; he does not talk, he declaims.*]

ALMADY. Good morning. [*Sees* ILONA, *surprised.*] Hullo. *You* here?

TURAI. Yes, she's here.

ALMADY. But what's the matter? Has something happened?

ILONA. Oh, do sit down.

TURAI. [*Grimly.*] He'll sit down quite soon enough. I'm not afraid of *his* not sitting down.

ALMADY. [*To* ALMADY.] You'll forgive me if I seem nervous. . . .

TURAI. Glass of brandy?

ALMADY. Thank you. [*Deliberately.*] *Never* in the morning.

TURAI. Mr. Almady, you are a married man and the father of a family. And you are forcing your attentions on another man's fiancée.

ALMADY. [*Indignantly.*] It's an outrageous lie.

TURAI. Good. I thought you were going to say it was none of my business. You would have been quite right. But a lie—no, I'm afraid that won't do.

ALMADY. [*Aggressively.*] Mr. Turai, I would have you know—

TURAI. Shut up!

ALMADY. [*Outraged.*] "Shut up!"

TURAI. [*Significantly.*] Lemon! [ALMADY *sits down abruptly.*] I told you he'd sit down. [ALMADY

looks at the left wall.] Yes, quite right. It's as thin as paper.

ALMADY. [*Rises.*] Now come, Mr. Turai, between two gentlemen. . . .

TURAI. I beg your pardon?

ALMADY. As one gentleman to another, I ask your discretion. . . .

TURAI. Sit down.

ALMADY. [*Sitting down anxiously.*] Why? Is there something else coming?

TURAI. [*Crosses to right and listens at staircase.*] Yes, there is something else coming. Are you sitting down?

ALMADY. Yes.

TURAI. Then listen. I wasn't the only one who heard everything. Her fiancé was in this room with me at the time, and his hearing is excellent.

ALMADY. [*Strangling.*] Brandy!

TURAI. [*Pouring it out.*] In the morning? [*Gives* ALMADY *the brandy.*]

ALMADY. I always take it in the morning. [*He gulps it down.*]

ILONA. Well, what are you going to do now, you miserable idiot, you? You see what you've done.

You've driven me to suicide. Oh God! I shall die. I shall die!

ALMADY. [*Rising melodramatically.*] I'll die with you!

ILONA. I don't want you! I'm going to die alone.

ALMADY. [*Pompously.*] I am ready to give him satisfaction.

TURAI. That's the last straw. [*As* ALMADY *starts to speak.*] I'll tell you what you are going to do. You are going to do just as I order.

ALMADY. [*Starting up.*] Order?

TURAI. Sit down.

[ALMADY *sits down.*]

ILONA. Yes—order. [*To* TURAI—*rapidly.*] Tell us, please. Never mind how much he rants.

ALMADY. [*Indignantly.*] Rants! You dare to criticise my diction?

TURAI. Oh! Damn your diction! Just thank your stars that I'm going to get you out of this. A married man! Father of a family. With four children at home—four little lemons! [ALMADY *rises.*] One word from you, and this telegram, all ready and written, goes off to your wife.

[ALMADY *looks again at wall and groans.*]

ILONA. Look at him. Don't look at the wall. Last night was the time to have done that.

TURAI. In that room next door—last night—something occurred.

ILONA. [*Ashamed.*] Yes, yes, *please*. We know what occurred.

TURAI. That is just what you don't know. You are now going to hear. What occurred was the rehearsal of a play. Do you grasp my meaning?

ILONA. In the middle of the night?

TURAI. In the middle of the night.

ALMADY. How do you mean—the rehearsal of a play?

TURAI. Your very loud remarks, so loud that they actually penetrated the wall—were dialogue from a play. Now, do you understand?

ILONA. I do. [*To* ALMADY.] Don't you—idiot? [*Rises.*] It's the most marvelous, wonderful idea, you old darling. . . .

[*She is just about to embrace* TURAI, when *she stops in consternation.*]

TURAI. What's the matter?

ILONA. It's no good. He'd never believe it.

TURAI. Why wouldn't he believe it?

ILONA. Where on earth is there a play with lines in it like those?

TURAI. Where? [*Picking up pile of papers from the table.*] Here.

ILONA. What do you mean?

TURAI. [*Pointing.*] Here you are. Here's the play. This is it.

ILONA. Who wrote it?

TURAI. I did. Don't stare at me, my dear child, with those starry eyes of blue. [*Sits on bench.*] Rather ask when I wrote it.

ILONA. When could you have written it?

TURAI. This morning—between four and six. After all, one is either a playwright or one isn't. Half of it I heard through the wall; the other half I wrote to fit. In this life, everyone has to fight with his own weapons. My weapon is the pen! And, on this occasion I hope it will prove considerably mightier than the sword. I am feeling this morning like an acrobat, who for once has the chance to use his skill to save a life. I don't suppose any play has ever yet been written with such purely altruistic motives. Well, there you are. There's the play. Read it—learn it and play it.

[*He gives her the manuscript.*]

ILONA. *Play* it?

TURAI. Naturally you must play it. How else can you make him believe without a shadow of doubt that what you were saying last night was just dialogue? Off you go. Dress rehearsal early this evening. Opening to-night.

ALMADY. To-night? But where?

TURAI. At the concert, of course. After dinner in the ballroom. [*To* ILONA.] You're down on the programme already for something or other.

ILONA. A couple of songs. [*Contemptuously.*] He's to recite some poems.

TURAI. Then there'll be a slight change in the programme. He'll act with you instead—a one-act play.

ILONA. [*Looking at script.*] But how on earth can I learn all this by to-night?

[ALMADY *goes to window.*]

TURAI. Well, really! Last night you knew it well enough. [ALMADY *sighs deeply.*] What's the matter with you?

ALMADY. [*Comes down.*] Mr. Turai, that was a sigh of relief. Do you *know* my wife?

TURAI. I do. Didn't I tell you that it was a matter of death?

ALMADY. How can I ever thank you?

[*He holds out his hand.* TURAI *ignores it.*]

TURAI. Don't bother to try. If you think I'm doing this for your sake, my good man, you're greatly mistaken. Unfortunately, my life-saving apparatus is so constructed that you automatically have to be rescued, too.

ILONA. Oh, but listen. . . .

TURAI. Now what is it?

ILONA. What earthly reason could we have had for rehearsing at three in the morning?

TURAI. That's what I ask myself, but I answer myself—quite simple. You had to play the thing tonight. You'd lost a lot of time on a picnic. Every moment was precious. You were so conscientious that when you came home you insisted on rehearsing even though it was three o'clock in the morning.

ILONA. Well, we'd better go and start studying at once. I'm a very slow study.

TURAI. One minute. Don't get excited. Who's supposed to be running this concert?

ILONA. The Count's secretary, Mr. Mell.

TURAI. We must notify him of this change in the

programme. [*Goes to telephone.*] Hello. . . . Give me Mr. Mell's room, please.

ILONA. But he'll be asleep.

TURAI. Oh no, my dear. Not after this telephone bell has rung once or twice. [*He hands* ILONA *the receiver.*] There you are—ladies first.

ILONA. [*Taking telephone.*] But what am I to say?

TURAI. Keep calm. I'll prompt you.

ILONA. Hello! Is that Mr. Mell? Yes, it is early, isn't it?

[*She looks at* TURAI *for directions.*]

TURAI. Good morning.

ILONA. [*Into the telephone.*] Good morning.

TURAI. How did you sleep?

ILONA. [*Her hand over the receiver.*] I *can't* say that. The poor man is furious.

TURAI. [*Shrugging.*] Use your own judgment, then.

ILONA. [*Into the telephone in her most seductive manner.*] Dear Mr. Mell! [*Coos.*] I'm so dreadfully sorry to wake you up at this hour, but I wanted to tell you that there will be a little change in the programme to-night. I'm sure the Count will be pleased. I'm sure you will be pleased. I'm sure the audience will be pleased.

TURAI. Unanimous.

ILONA. [*Into the telephone.*] Instead of working alone, I'm going to appear with Mr. Almady. Yes, Mr. Almady. In an extremely witty, charming, brilliant little duologue. [TURAI *bows.* ILONA *listens at the telephone for a moment. Then she turns to* TURAI *and asks, as if she were still speaking to* MELL.] What kind of a play is it?

TURAI. French.

ILONA. [*Into the telephone.*] French. [*As before.*] Who wrote it?

TURAI. Geraldy.

ILONA. Geraldy, I believe. . . . [*Pause.*] Oh, isn't that nice!

TURAI. [*Apprehensive.*] What's nice?

ILONA. [*Hand over receiver.*] He says he knows every line that Geraldy ever wrote.

TURAI. Then it's by Sardou.

ILONA. [*Into the telephone.*] No, I'm sorry. I've just been looking at the script again. It's not by Geraldy; it's by Sardou.

TURAI. The Great Sardou.

ILONA. [*Into the telephone.*] The Great Sardou! . . . Indeed?

TURAI. How is he up on Sardou?

ILONA. [*Covering receiver.*] He says the only thing of Sardou's he knows is Hedda Gabbler.

TURAI. [*Delighted.*] That's the man for us!

ILONA. [*Into the telephone.*] That's the man for us.

TURAI. No, no, no! That last remark was supposed to be confidential.

ILONA. Good-bye, and thank you so much, Mr. Mell. You've been so sweet. . . . Oh, of course—as if we'd dream of having anybody but you as a prompter! . . . The title?

TURAI. A tooth for a tooth!

ILONA. [*Into the telephone.*] A truth . . .

TURAI. Tooth, tooth.

ILONA. A tooth for a tooth. . . . Yes, isn't it? Quite snappy. [*Coos.*] Good-bye. [*She hangs up receiver and turns to* TURAI.] Why a *French* piece?

TURAI. Merely to ensure that nobody will know who wrote it. That's the beauty of French literature—there's such a lot of it. Besides, one has one's conscience. I've stolen so much from the French in my time that it's only fair I should give *them* something for a change. And now that everything seems to be working out all right, let me say with

all the emphasis at my disposal—get out. Go and study! [*To* Almady.] And—so that no one will recognize my handwriting—*you* have got to copy out the script.

almady. All of it?

turai. From beginning to end.

almady. You think of everything.

turai. Unlike a certain Southern fruit.

ilona. [*Who has been looking through the script.*] Oh, but this isn't right.

turai. What isn't?

ilona. This line. You make me say "Your kiss is revolting to me." What I really said was . . .

turai. "That was your old kiss. Sweet and burning like hot punch." I know. My memory is excellent. But fortunately we got the boy out of the room before you got that far.

almady. And may I be permitted to inquire *why* my kiss should be described as revolting?

turai. The line occurs in the second part of the play, where I was relying on my native inspiration.

almady. You call my kiss revolting? I wish to know why.

TURAI. That is how I *see* it. I am the author of this play, and that is my opinion of your kiss.

[ALMADY *goes up stage in a huff.*]

ILONA. I do think you might have made some noise to warn us. Why couldn't you have coughed or something?

TURAI. Suppose I had, what should I have been able to do *now?* You overlook the fact that your very first words, my dear Ilona, left no room for misunderstanding. If I had stopped you then nothing could have averted the tragedy.

ALMADY. [*Coming down mollified.*] What a brain!

TURAI. You flatter me!

ILONA. No, he doesn't. He's right for once. Did this idea come to you the moment you heard us?

TURAI. No, I got it from you.

ILONA. From us?

TURAI. Yes, stupid of me, I admit. You see, I always assume the best of my fellowmen. And just for a minute I did think that you really were acting. Later on, I realized my mistake.

ILONA. You thought we were acting. Why?

TURAI. Because it all sounded so artificial. No ring

of conviction. I refer particularly to the more erotic passages.

ILONA. I don't wonder. Considering I don't care one little bit for the man. . . .

ALMADY. What's that?

ILONA. You heard.

ALMADY. You don't love me?

ILONA. No.

ALMADY. [*Furious.*] So you were lying.

ILONA. Yes.

ALMADY. Just to get rid of me?

ILONA. [*With loathing, vehemently.*] Yes. I hate the sight of you!

ALMADY. [*Bitterly.*] Serpent!

ILONA. I'd like to murder you!

ALMADY. [*Bursts into ludicrous sobs.*]

TURAI. My God!—this is the limit!

TURAI. If you want to cry all over anyone, cry all over me. I like it. It's like a tonic to me.

ALMADY. What made you realize that we were not acting?

TURAI. The disgusting, sloppy way you began carry-

ing on. No author living would dare put slush like that in the mouth of an actor who was supposed to be making love.

ALMADY. Sloppy?

TURAI. Beyond words.

ALMADY. [*With indignation.*] Allow me to inform you—

TURAI. Shut up!

ALMADY. [*His dignity collapsing.*] Oh, very well.

TURAI. My friends may be here any minute now. Please go and study your parts. [*To* ILONA, *who has been turning over the leaves of the script.*] That's a bit you'll have to learn particularly well.

ILONA. Which?

TURAI. [*Pointing to manuscript.*] These lines here. This loathsome series of speeches—the ones we overheard last night. [*Points.*] From there to there.

[ALMADY *looks at script.*]

ILONA. [*Reads.*] Odd—I hardly remember—

TURAI. I do. Nor is your fiancé likely to have forgotten.

ILONA. [*Reading.*] "I worship you. I adore you. I love you as the church steeple loves the cloud that

settles on its summit." [Almady *turns away, embarrassed.*] Just words!

almady. [*Takes script.*] "You have used me up and squeezed me like a lemon."

ilona. [*Takes script.*] Yes, now I remember—

almady. It's all down, word for word.

[Turai *takes script.*]

turai. Yes, the passage is underlined in red ink. Three pages—here—from page sixteen. It goes on "Come here and let me kiss that beautiful classic brow"—and then—this is the worst bit, here—this mad outburst of sensuality— [*Reads rapidly.*] "When I look at *that*—at the perfect shape. The rose flush of that skin— Just to stroke it! . . .

ilona. Yes, but I . . .

turai. I know, I know. [*Reads.*] "Hands off!" you said. But he couldn't have obeyed you for he goes on "My God! How round it is! How smooth! How velvety!" And then I'm afraid he must have got very close indeed for he adds, "And how fragrant." That's right, isn't it?

almady. Quite right. It *was* fragrant.

ilona. But I . . .

TURAI. No, my dear, you did *not*. There was a complete silence until you exclaimed, "You mustn't bite. . . ." [*Both turn away.*] Yes, I should think you *would* be ashamed of yourselves. [*He gives* ILONA *the script.*] All right, then; copy it out and learn it. If you ever studied parts in your lives, study these. We'll have the dress rehearsal at seven-thirty sharp, here in this room. I'll give you a run through. And after dinner, first performance. And now—?

ILONA. Out we go, eh?

TURAI. You took the words out of my mouth. And don't forget, we've not seen each other for three months.

ILONA. All right—three months.

ALMADY. [*Going out.*] A colossal brain!

[*They bow.*]

TURAI. I thank you.

[ALMADY *and* ILONA *go into her room.* TURAI *sits down and resumes his interrupted breakfast. Throughout the following scene he goes on eating quietly, deliberately, and with a good appetite.*]

[MANSKY *enters at right, also in white flannels, but looking more doleful and dejected than ever.*]

MANSKY. Have you been up long?

TURAI. I couldn't sleep. [*He goes on eating.*] How's our infant?

MANSKY. Woke up a moment ago. I left him dressing.

TURAI. You had breakfast yet?

MANSKY. Not a mouthful. Couldn't touch it. *You* seem to have no difficulty in putting it away.

TURAI. [*With mock sadness.*] One must keep up one's strength.

MANSKY. I'm amazed, and, if I may say so, a little shocked. Sitting there gorging as if nothing had happened. Can't you realize we're absolutely ruined? I'm positively ill thinking about it.

TURAI. [*Mysteriously.*] Shall I let you into a secret, Mansky?

MANSKY. [*With excited anticipation.*] Yes. Tell me.

TURAI. [*With great deliberation.*] I am a man who weighs his words. I do not speak lightly. And I say to you solemnly, my friend, [*dramatic pause.*] that this is the best bit of ham I've ever tasted.

MANSKY. [*Furious.*] Bah!

[*Crosses left to a mirror.*]

TURAI. [*Continuing as before.*] Juicy—nutty—positively good. [*Solicitously.*] Did the boy sleep at all?

MANSKY. He dropped off about daylight out of sheer exhaustion. [*Looks in the glass.*] I'm pale.

TURAI. Say anything?

MANSKY. Not a word. Just stared at the ceiling. You know, that's bad.

TURAI. Ceilings aren't so bad. Walls are much worse.

MANSKY. What I can't understand is why a magnificent place like this should have walls like tissue-paper.

TURAI. Ah! These are deep waters.

MANSKY. [*Irritated.*] Do stop eating!

TURAI. But I haven't finished.

MANSKY. Gobble—gobble—gobble! [*Looks in the glass.*] My God! I am pale!

TURAI. Suits you. Intellectual pallor.

MANSKY. [*Crosses to* TURAI.] What about that solution you were hinting at last night?

TURAI. There were several possibilities. I considered them all thoroughly in the night watches—while you lay snoring in your bed. Oh yes, I heard you

while I was changing my clothes. [*Points to the table.*] Telegrams, letters, all ready. Finally I hit on the best and simplest plan.

MANSKY. Which is?

TURAI. I'm going to do everything possible to make him break with her.

MANSKY. What for?

TURAI. Because that's the surest way of bringing them together. If he casts her off forever—in two weeks he'll be rushing after her and falling at her feet. The lady—after a little coaxing—will allow herself to melt. He will coax a little more. She will melt a little more. Finally she will melt altogether —and the curtain will fall on the lovers' slow embrace.

MANSKY. [*With cumulative contempt.*] You thought of that in the night, did you?

TURAI. I did.

MANSKY. All by yourself?

TURAI. All by myself.

MANSKY. Well!!! I've noticed all this past year that you've been slipping. I realise now, that you've completely lost your grip. Our last show died the

death simply because you would write psychology into it. And now you've become simply drivelling. It's a great shock to me. Do you know what's happening? Little by little you're beginning to think —and that spells ruin for both of us. Haven't you grasped yet what a frightful knock-down blow last night's affair was to that boy?

TURAI. Sh! Sh! [*Listens, pointing to door right.*] Here he is! [*Enter* ADAM. *He is also in white flannels. Very solemn and miserable. Pause. He passes them without a word and goes to balcony.*] Hullo! Not even a good morning?

ADAM. Oh, good morning.

[TURAI *rises;* MANSKY *looks longingly at breakfast things.*]

MANSKY. [*To* ADAM *with his best bed-side manner.*] Had breakfast?

ADAM. No.

[MANSKY *goes above table and sits down; starts to eat.*]

TURAI. [*To* ADAM.] Sleep?

ADAM. No.

TURAI. Nor did I. [ADAM *looks at left wall.*] No. Nothing from there. Not another sound. He left

and she went to sleep. *I* didn't on your account. [To Mansky.] Hullo! Appetite picking up? Appetite picking up?

MANSKY. [*Starting guiltily and pushing his plate away.*] No. I can't swallow. Too nervous. I'm a wreck.

TURAI. Try the ham.

ADAM. [*Goes to* TURAI.] I—my dear Uncle Sandor —I don't want to be a burden to you two any longer—now that my life has been blown to bits.

TURAI. Come, come, come!

ADAM. I mean it. I know what I'm talking about. There's a great crack in my heart, and—

TURAI. Come now,—be a man. We had enough of that sort of talk last night. Tell me just what is it you want to do?

ADAM. Before anything else, I want to get away from this place.

TURAI. Quite reasonable. And then?

ADAM. Then I'll tear up the music I wrote for her—tear it into little bits and burn it.

TURAI. Right. And after that?

ADAM. Don't be so casual. You know I have nobody

in the world but you—you two. If you hadn't been here, I'd have ended things long ago.

TURAI. [*To* MANSKY, *who has once more started on the breakfast.*] That's right. Peck a bit.

MANSKY. [*Jumping up.*] No. It's no good. Absolutely can't swallow. I'm a very sick man.

ADAM. You see? I'm to blame for that.

TURAI. Now listen to me, my boy. Sit down. [ADAM *sits.*] What has happened, has happened. It's over, done with, a thing of the past. And I'm going to say something to you now which no young person will ever believe. You're twenty-five and you're gifted. The world's at your feet. And that world, let me remind you, contains a great many million women.

ADAM. What good are they to me? I only wanted this one. [*Rises.*] Can't we get away now—at once. I won't see her!

TURAI. Oh yes, you will. No scandals, if you please. You arrived here late at night; everybody knows she is your fiancée, you can't run away this morning. Now, I'm not going to urge—in fact, I—er—positively forbid you to become reconciled to her, —but you must do the sensible thing. In the course of the morning we will go to her and pay our respects, and stay on here another day or two,

and we will not breathe a word of what happened last night. You will behave towards her quite nicely and naturally. I know it will hurt. It's a bitter pill to swallow. But to-day you are a man.

ADAM. Yes. You're right.

TURAI. Up with the head and out with the chin and damn everybody! That's the stuff. The day after to-morrow, when we leave, you shall write her a letter, and let yourself go as much as you like. And, no matter how it may hurt, you have finished with that woman forever.

ADAM. [*With an effort.*] Very well. And if—it should hurt *too* much, don't be afraid that I'll go back to her. I'll always have pluck enough to put a bullet through my head.

MANSKY. There! See where you have got us to with your psychology.

TURAI. [*To* ADAM.] You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

ADAM. [*Smilingly.*] It's all right. It was silly of me to talk nonsense like that. I won't let you down. You shall be satisfied with me.

MANSKY. [*To* ADAM.] Good. Then you won't—er—tear anything up?

ADAM. No.

TURAI. You'll behave towards Ilona as if nothing had happened?

ADAM. Yes. Honour bright.
[*He holds out his hand.*]

TURAI. [*Rises.*] I am satisfied.

MANSKY. [*Sitting down to breakfast, a completely changed man.*] It's an enormous relief to me to see you getting hold of yourself again so capitally. [*Eats rapidly.*] Bless my soul, yes, an enormous relief. I really feel a little better.

TURAI. I'm proud of you. [*To* MANSKY.] Haven't you finished breakfast *yet?*

MANSKY. [*Delighted.*] I can swallow.

TURAI. So I notice.

MANSKY. [*To* ADAM.] Come and join me, my boy. You'll find your appetite steals back, little by little. [*To* TURAI, *who is standing beside him.*] He's suffering. He can't get over it.

TURAI. We must try to make him.

MANSKY. Come on, my boy—just a mouthful. Try a little of this excellent ham.

ADAM. I don't want any ham.

MANSKY. Well, a slice of chicken, then—and some nice hot tea with a drop of brandy.

ADAM. Oh, all right. [*Sits down.*]

MANSKY. [*To* TURAI, *who is sitting deep in thought.*] Well, what's on *your* mind?

ADAM. After trying to cheer *me* up, are you going to be depressed yourself?

MANSKY. Do you know what I think's the matter with him? He's got another—

TURAI. You win. Another problem.

MANSKY. Theatre?

TURAI. As always.

MANSKY. Oh, my God!

TURAI. Last night, when we came into this room, I was saying how hard it was to begin a play. I'm now thinking how hard it is to end a second act.

MANSKY. Oh, come and end your breakfast.

TURAI. No, I mean it. It's worrying me. Take this situation of ours, for instance—just as we did yesterday— We have had a curious experience. We arrived perfectly happy and immediately got a terrible shock—a ghastly disillusionment. We've managed to survive it, and we've got ourselves in hand again. But, suppose these things had happened not in real life but on the stage—suppose this were not a real room but a painted set—sup-

pose we three were characters in a play who had just passed through the experiences we have passed through—

MANSKY. Well?

TURAI. Well, how would you end the act?

MANSKY. [*Impatiently.*] My dear fellow! It's ended already.

TURAI. In a way, yes. But don't forget that, at the last moment, before the curtain actually falls, you need something more—a new note of suspense —a punch—both, if you can manage it. In fact, just what is implied in that word "Curtain." Curtain—Curtain. The act must end and yet it must not quite end. The audience's interest must be snapped up—given a jolt. So, my distinguished collaborator, how about it? You've often told me how good you are—try your hand at ending the second act of this dismal adventure of ours.

MANSKY. My dear chap, simplicity itself. Come here. Sit down. [TURAI *sits at table.*] Now then. I'm all for the quiet curtain. One of those charming delicate things the French do so well. *You* know —sophisticated—lightly sentimental—the smile behind the tear. The three friends sit down to breakfast. Audiences always like to see actors eating. The storm has passed. The skies are still

a little dark, but there is sunshine in the heart and all that sort of thing. Let this sink in for a bit—everything very cozy and pleasant. Business of eating—we each have a glass of wine. [*They all take up their glasses.*] For a moment—silence—their thoughts are busy with what has passed. [*Pause.*] Capital. And then—[*He raises his glass.*]—you want a couple of smart lines, spoken with something of a flourish. [*Thinks.*] Oh, well—[*Then as if he had thought of what he wanted to say—to* Adam.] My young friend, to-day you have become a man—

TURAI. [*Pointing to where he was sitting at the time.*] *I* said that.

MANSKY. For—always remember—

TURAI. Yes, that shows 'em it's coming.

MANSKY. [*Not heeding him.*] Always remember that in affairs of the heart it is not the first victory that makes us men, but the first defeat. [*Lifts his glass.*] To Woman's Treachery, which has made our child a man! [*Raises his hand toward the curtain.*] Curtain. [*Curtain starts to come down. They put their glasses down on the table, simultaneously, untasted.* Mansky *smiles complacently.*] How's that?

TURAI. Rotten! [*Curtain slowly goes up again.*]

[*Gets up.*] Tame. Feeble. Nothing in the nature of a high spot. I'm not saying it isn't pretty and graceful. Charming even—but it lacks suspense. [Pause.] [*To* ADAM.] How would *you* do it?

ADAM. I? Feeling as I do now?

TURAI. Give us your idea.

ADAM. [*With tremendous intensity.*] Very well, I'll give you my idea. We start from where Mansky gave that toast.

MANSKY. To Woman's—?

ADAM. [*Rises.*] Treachery. That's it. I'd say—"No. I won't drink any toast." [*Throws glass against the wall smashing it to bits.*]

MANSKY. [*Approvingly.*] Effective.

ADAM. [*Rapidly losing control of himself and becoming hysterical.*] That woman was not just an incident in my life. She was my first great passion. I promised to act as if nothing had happened. I meant to keep that promise. But when I remember that I gave her my life and that she whispers words of love to another man—and—and kisses another man, that's such unbearable, burning torture, that the only right solution— [*Grabs small game carving knife from table.*]

TURAI. [*Leaping forward.*] Hey! Stop that!

ADAM. [*Struggling with him.*] No! No!

MANSKY. [*Rushing forward.*] My God! You weren't really—

ADAM. [*Struggling.*] Let me go. I want to die.

[Turai *has got knife away from him. He looks at it intently.* Adam *stands, pale and defiant.*]

TURAI. What the devil do you think you're doing?

ADAM. [*Bitterly.*] Just—finishing the act. [*He sits down.* Mansky *follows him and sits down, too. Smiles wanly.*] Curtain!

[*Curtain starts to come down.*]

TURAI. [*Putting the knife away.*] Very bad. [*Curtain goes up slowly again.*] Quite impossible. Death's all right for the end of a play, but absolutely no good for a second act. Besides, the scene was too crude. I don't say the gallery might not like it, but think what the critics would say. They despise melodrama. Suspense is what you want—suspense and then a quick curtain.

MANSKY. And now, I suppose, you could show us how it really ought to be done?

TURAI. [*Goes to telephone.*] Hello. Will you give me Miss Ilona Szabo's room, please.

[*Bell sounds in* Ilona's *room.*]

MANSKY. [*Starting.*] What on earth—?

ILONA'S VOICE. Hello.

TURAI. Hello. Ilona?

ILONA'S VOICE. Yes. Who is that speaking?

TURAI. Don't you recognize my voice? This is Sandor Turai.

ILONA'S VOICE. Oh, how wonderful! Are you here, then? Where are you speaking from?

TURAI. Yes, I'm right here in the castle. Next door to you. Number four.

ILONA'S VOICE. What a perfectly delightful surprise.

TURAI. We came by car last night. All three of us.

ILONA'S VOICE. You don't mean Albert, too?

TURAI. Yes—and Mansky, if you think that worth mentioning. We're all three here in this room, and we've brought you the finished script of the operetta.

ILONA'S VOICE. Marvellous! That's something like a surprise.

TURAI. We were hesitating about waking you so early, but I particularly wanted to see you about

something. Can you come in here for a minute?

[*Replaces receiver and goes to door.* Adam *and* Mansky *stand where they are.*]

[*Enter* Ilona *with assumed joy and excitement.*]

ILONA. Well, this is wonderful of you all. [*She kisses* Turai *lightly and crosses quickly to* Adam *who kisses her hands.*] What a surprise. Albert darling! This *is* a surprise. [*She hangs onto* Adam's *arm.*] Sandor! To think that it's—

TURAI. —three whole months—

ILONA. —three whole months since I've seen you. How brown you're looking. And younger than ever. Let me look at you. Wonderful! [*She crosses to* Mansky *and kisses him on each cheek.*] And Mansky—how are *you*, Mansky dear? I think this is too sweet of you all. You don't know how I've been longing to see you. When did you get here? [*She returns to* Adam.]

TURAI. [*Very gravely.*] Just a minute, Ilona. [*He looks through door into her room.*] Why, Mr. Almady! Of all people! Won't you come in?

[*Enter* Almady.]

ALMADY. [*Nervously.*] Good morning.

TURAI. Fancy finding *you* here after all these years.

ALMADY. [*Pompously.*] Passing through. Just passing through. I only wanted to say how-d'you-do to the Count, but they wouldn't let me go. The—er—the shooting-party you know, and the concert. They insisted on my staying.

ILONA. I was *so* surprised to see him.

TURAI. Pardon me for disturbing you and possibly casting a slight gloom on what must have been a joyful reunion, but I have something rather important to say.

[ILONA *drops* ADAM'S *arm.*]

ILONA. [*Crosses to* TURAI.] What do you mean? Nothing—nothing unpleasant, I hope?

TURAI. Yes—extremely unpleasant. [ILONA *sits down, terrified. To* ALMADY.] Please. [*He motions them to sit down.*] Well, then. We arrived here last night— [*Long pause.*] And just now we were sitting having breakfast—we three— [*To* MANSKY.] Weren't we?

ADAM. [*Puzzled.*] Yes.

MANSKY. Well?

TURAI. Keep quite calm, please. We were sitting here, having breakfast—all three of us. [*He lowers his voice and speaks very earnestly.*] I must entreat

you all to hear what I am about to say quite calmly— Don't lose your heads—

ILONA. For God's sake—

ALMADY. [*Uneasily.*] Well? What is it?

TURAI. [*Holds up his hand.*] Please! [*Dead silence.*] What I am about to say—and I shall not detain you long now—must almost inevitably have a shattering effect on the lives—both the private and the professional lives—of all us five people. I have asked myself—is it wise to speak? And I have answered myself—wise or not, it is unavoidable. Ilona— [ILONA *rises; gasping.*] I have a question to ask you— [*Breaks off. Dead silence. Then very simply to* MANSKY.] How's that for suspense?

MANSKY. Yes. Yes. Well? What now?

TURAI. Nothing. That's all. [*Smiles.*] Curtain! [*Curtain comes down quickly and rises immediately. He offers* ILONA *his arm, as the rest of the group breathe again and relax their tension.*] We've just been having an argument about the proper way to end a second act. [*Leads* ILONA *slowly to door, left to hall, the others following.*] I couldn't resist the temptation to show these colleagues of mine how, by the most simple methods, you can make an act end on a note of suspense. You see—

[*He goes out, talking, followed first by* ALMADY, *then by* ADAM *and* MANSKY.]

MANSKY. [*Going out; to* ADAM.] Crazy. Absolutely crazy. Thinks of nothing in the world but the theatre— [*The curtain falls again.*]

ACT THREE

As the curtain rises it reveals the room lighted up by the electric sconces and candelabra. A large and elaborately painted screen in silver and green has been placed in front of the window. It is painted to suggest an orchard. The screen shuts out the view of the Mediterranean, but to the left and right of it we glimpse the lighted esplanade, and many more twinkling lights than in the first act, for it is early evening. There are two garden chairs in front of the screen in the raised portion of the room; otherwise the scene is unchanged. MR. MELL, *the count's secretary, and the master of ceremonies, enters at left from the hall. He is a fussy, pale young man with high pitched voice. He wears glasses and is in evening clothes. He is carrying a wicker table, and carrying it with difficulty and discomfort. He places it between the two wicker chairs in front of the screen and stands caressing his hands where the table has cut into them.*

MELL. [*Calls.*] Dwornitschek. [*To himself.*] Where is that man? [*Calls.*] Dwornitschek.

DWORNITSCHEK'S VOICE. Coming, sir, coming.

[DWORNITSCHEK *enters from the hall, followed by a lackey. They are both in formal, full dress livery of white with knee breeches, and powdered wigs.* DWORNITSCHEK *carries a book, two letters, a scarf and a woman's hat. The lackey carries a tall brown hunting hat, whip, gauntlets and a large, luscious peach.*]

MELL. Oh, there you are at last. Why are you so late?

DWORNITSCHEK. I fell downstairs, sir.

MELL. Well, that oughtn't to have taken you long. [*He fiddles with the screen.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. You should have let *me* carry those things, Mr. Mell.

MELL. I couldn't wait. You are so slow.

DWORNITSCHEK. Slow but sure, sir. [*He puts things on table.*] When I was a lad, my mother used to say . . .

MELL. I don't want to hear about your mother.

DWORNITSCHEK. No, sir. Very few people do.

MELL. Have you got all the properties?

DWORNITSCHEK. Props, sir, is the more professional expression.

MELL. I was using the more technical term. . . . Well, properties or props, have you got them?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. Book. . .

MELL. . . . Peach. . .

DWORNITSCHEK. . . . Scarf . . .

MELL. . . . Whip . . .

DWORNITSCHEK. . . . Two letters and a pair of gloves.

MELL. Good. [*Mops his forehead.*] Oh dear, what a headache I'm getting.

DWORNITSCHEK. What you want is an aspirin.

MELL. Have you an aspirin?

DWORNITSCHEK. No, sir.

MELL. You're a great help.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank you, sir. If I might be allowed to say so, you let yourself get too nervous on these festive nights, sir. You *worry.*

MELL. How can I help worrying, with all the responsibility there is on my shoulders?

DWORNITSCHEK. What I always say is— Never worry too much to-day. Things may be worse to-morrow, and then you can worry twice as hard.

MELL. It does make me so nervous when people want to alter the programme at the last moment. First Miss Szabo says she's going to sing, then she says she's going to act. . . . [*He breaks off as* ALMADY *enters, goes to* ALMADY.] Good evening, sir, good evening. You are first in the field.

ALMADY. [*Grouchily.*] Good evening. The others will be here directly. They're dressing.

MELL. A wonderful shooting party to-day, sir. Capital sport, capital. There is nothing like a good brisk day out in the open with the guns. What a colour it has given you.

ALMADY. I wasn't there.

MELL. Eh? Oh! Not there?

ALMADY. No. I've been in my room all day, writing.

MELL. Pardon my curiosity, but may one ask what you were writing?

ALMADY. No, one may not.

DWORNITSCHEK. [*Explaining.*] I think the gentleman does not wish to say what he was writing, sir.

MELL. Oh, are you still there?

DWORNITSCHEK. Yes, sir. Still here.

MELL. Then go away.

DWORNITSCHEK. Very good, sir. Really I shouldn't worry, Mr. Mell. Look on the bright side, sir.

MELL. All very well for you. You have no responsibilities, and the guests give you big tips.

DWORNITSCHEK. That *is* the bright side, sir. [*He goes out at left to hall followed by the lackey.*]

MELL. A secretary's life is a dog's life, Mr. Almady. Work, work, work from morning till night, and never a word of thanks. [ALMADY *takes no notice.*] You are very silent, Mr. Almady.

ALMADY. I sometimes find it soothing to be silent. Try it yourself one of these days . . . I take it the concert begins directly after dinner?

MELL. Immediately following the serving of coffee.

ALMADY. And when does this—this play of ours come on?

MELL. It is the last item on the programme. The place of honour.

ALMADY. Bah! [*Walks away upstage.*]

MELL. Sir? [*Follows him.*]

ALMADY. [*Absorbed in his part which he is studying.*] Nothing.

MELL. Miss Szabo tells me that no scenery is required but two elegant chairs and one elegant table.

ALMADY. Is that an elegant table?

MELL. Well, really—no. But what can one expect in a garden? Oh—if only the scene had been an interior there's some perfectly lovely furniture in the Count's room—genuine Louis the Fifteenth. A very elegant period, Louis the Fifteenth.

ALMADY. I don't care a damn. They're all the same to me. Louis the Fifteenth or Louis the Fourteenth or Louis the Seventeenth.

MELL. But there isn't a Louis the *Seventeenth*, and I've often wondered why. Why, I've wondered, should there be a Louis the *Sixteenth* and a Louis the *Eighteenth*, but not a Louis the *Seventeenth?*

ALMADY. [*Exasperated.*] Oh, God. Ask a furniture dealer.

MELL. I did. I'm *always* asking furniture dealers. But they only know as far as Louis the *Sixteenth.* That's where the Louis stop for furniture dealers. Whenever I say Louis the *Seventeenth* they say you mean the *Sixteenth*, and I say no, I don't mean Louis the *Sixteenth*, I mean Louis the *Seventeenth* and . . . [*Breaks off and mops his brow.*] I'm afraid I'm talking a great deal, sir.

ALMADY. Oh, you've noticed that?

MELL. The fact is, Mr. Almady, I'm all of a twitter.

ALMADY. What have *you* got to be nervous about?

MELL. I'm always like this on these big nights. You see I'm responsible for everything and its terribly wearing on the nerves. [*During this long speech of* MELL'S, ALMADY *becomes bored and walks away,* MELL *suddenly aware that he is talking to the air, follows him.*] I'm stage manager, property man and prompter. I turn the music, show the ladies to their seats, hand bouquets onto the stage—and I'm expected always to applaud at the right moment. I assure you I have often gone to bed after one of these entertainments with my hands so tender I could scarcely hold my toothbrush. [ALMADY *does not answer.*] You will pardon me for mentioning it, sir, but you don't seem quite your merry old self to-night.

ALMADY. I'm as cheerful as any man would be whose brain had been addled from studying an infernal part all day.

MELL. But I thought you said you had spent the day writing?

ALMADY. Yes, I—I always memorize a part by writing it out.

MELL. What energy! What enthusiasm! Have you a nice part?

ALMADY. No. Rotten.

MELL. Dear, dear, dear! You'll feel better when you hear the applause. We're great applauders here. We don't care *how* bad an actor is—

ALMADY. [*Offended moves away.*] Thank you.

MELL. [*Follows.*] I beg your pardon. I—I don't mean it like that. [*Goes to door of* ILONA's *room and knocks.*] Miss Szabo, please. Miss Szabo, please. Beginners, please.

[*Enter* ILONA *in evening dress.*]

[*Enter* ADAM, *right, in dress clothes.*]

ILONA. Well, we seem to be all here. [ALMADY *bows.*]

MELL. Good evening, Miss Szabo, good evening, good evening.

ILONA. Well, we may as well begin.

ALMADY. Wouldn't it be as well to wait for Mr. Turai? [*Bitterly.*] Seeing that he is being so kind as to give us his invaluable assistance.

ILONA. He'll be here directly. Where is the prompter?

MELL. Present. Present.

ILONA. Here's the script. [*Hands it to him.*]

MELL. [*Goes to stage.*] I hope this extemporé set meets with your approval? [*Pointing to screen.*] A little idea quite of my own.

ILONA. Charming. [*To* ADAM *sincerely, deeply concerned.*] Albert—you seem—you seem—very quiet —this evening.

[MELL *sits.*]

ADAM. Oh, no, not a bit. A little tired, that's all. We had rather a long motor drive and I didn't get much sleep last night— Please don't think— [*Breaks off as* MELL *shows signs of impatience.*] I'm afraid our friend the secretary is getting restive.

ILONA. What on earth is the matter?

MELL. I'm all of a twitter.

ILONA. Well, do simmer down. [*To* ADAM, *who has sat down.*] Surely you're not going to stay for this rehearsal?

ADAM. If you don't mind.

ILONA. Oh, I don't mind. But you'll be thoroughly bored. A silly little French piece. You'll be seeing it after dinner. I should have thought once would have been enough.

ADAM. Well, as a matter of fact, Mr. Turai asked me to stay and help out till he came. And I promised him I would.

ILONA. Just as you please. [*Very nervous.*] Can't we begin? Are the props here?

MELL. Nothing is ever missing when I am the property man. There they all are—on the table. [*Points to table.* MELL *picks up scarf and hat and helps* ILONA.]

ILONA. [*Takes book and letter.*] Those are yours. [ALMADY *pockets the peach and the remaining letter.*] Now then—let's start. The Countess—that's me—discovered alone. Seated in chair, reading book. [*Sits down.*] [*To* ALMADY.] You're not on yet. [ALMADY *stalks off to the left.*]

MELL. Do we go on now?

ILONA. Don't ask so many questions. Yes, go on. [*She reads book.*]

MELL. [*Reading from the script.*] Curtain rises on a glorious garden. Period Louis the Fifteenth.

ILONA. You don't have to read *that.*

MELL. [*Doubtfully.*] I always *have.*

ILONA. You only have to give the actors the spoken lines.

MELL. Now, I never knew *that* before— Now, that's very interesting. [*He looks stupidly at script.*]

ALMADY. [*Coming down.*] What on earth's the matter now?

ILONA. I'm afraid Mr. Mell is not much of a prompter.

ADAM. [*Taking script from* MELL.] It's all right—let *me* hold the book.

ILONA. No.

ALMADY. [*Simultaneously.*] No, no.

ILONA. You mustn't.

ADAM. What do you mean?

ILONA. I won't have it—

ADAM. Why not?

MELL. [*To* ADAM, *offended, sarcastically.*] No doubt Miss Szabo means that it is beneath the dignity of such an important person. Please give *me* the book.

ADAM. Do stop fussing. Can't you see you make them nervous.

MELL. Make *them* nervous? What about *my* nervousness?

ADAM. I tell you *I'll* hold the book. And you can do it for the performance. Does *that* satisfy you?

MELL. [*Deeply offended.*] Oh, quite. Oh, perfectly—

ILONA. [*To* ADAM.] Now you've hurt the poor man's feelings. You've insulted him—

MELL. Madam, I'm a secretary. I spend all my time receiving insults.

ILONA. Oh?— Well, let's begin. [*To* ALMADY.] You're off. [*Again* ALMADY *stalks to left.*] Countess discovered seated in armchair, reading book. [*Takes up book.* ALMADY *is wearing the brown hat, gauntlets and carrying the riding whip.*]

ADAM. [*Prompting.*] What a silly—

ILONA. [*Speaking her lines.*] What a silly story. [*Closes book.*] Just like all novels.

ADAM. What *can* I do—

ILONA. [*Yawning.*] What *can* I do to kill the time? The Count is always out riding. Paris seems very far away amidst these sleepy fields of Normandy.

ADAM. Hoof-beats heard off— [MELL *imitates hoof-beats, by beating his thighs with his hands.*]

ILONA. Hark! I hear him coming— Can this be my husband? Surely he went off on his horse to visit our old tenant, honest Jacques Benoit.

[MELL *makes the hoof-beats louder and louder.* ALMADY *comes into the scene dramatically, ominously, but his entrance is completely ruined by* MELL *continuing the hoof-*

beats. Almady *stamps his feet impatiently and at last* Mell *stops.*]

ALMADY. So, madame!

ILONA. Why, what is the matter? Why do you frown, my dear Count?

ALMADY. Why do I frown? That, madame, you will learn—and speedily, as sure as my name is Count —Count— [*He can't remember his name.*]

ADAM. [*Prompting.*] Maurice du Veyrier—

ALMADY. As sure as my name is Count Maurice du Veyrier de la Grande Contumace Saint Emilion.

ILONA. You frighten me, Maurice.

ALMADY. It is your guilty conscience that frightens you, madame.

ADAM. Traitress.

[Ilona *starts and looks at him nervously.*]

[Adam *rises.*]

Traitress! No doubt you supposed me a credulous imbecile whom it was simple to hoodwink—

[*Enter* Turai *and* Mansky, *both in evening dress from the right.* Ilona *and* Almady *confused by their guilt, for the moment believe that* Adam *is accusing them.*]

ALMADY. [*Very embarrassed.*] No doubt—you—I——

ADAM. [*Still prompting.*] You thought that any story would do for me? You imagined that I was fool enough to swallow anything——

TURAI. [*Coming down, horrified, thinking that* ADAM *is making a scene.*] What!!!!!

ADAM. Shhhh!— [*Goes on prompting.*] No doubt you supposed me a credulous fool—

TURAI. [*Relieved; he grasps the situation.*] O-oh! [*Takes the script from him.*] Let *me* have that script.

ADAM. Why? [*To* ILONA.] Aren't I prompting well?

ILONA. No.

ALMADY. [*Simultaneously.*] No.

ADAM. [*Ruffled.*] Nothing like being frank.

MELL. [*Goes to* ADAM *and pats his shoulder.*] Don't take it to heart. Even *I* wasn't good enough for them.

ADAM. Perhaps you'll tell me where I went wrong?

TURAI. Don't ask so many questions. [*Seats himself in* MELL'S *place.*] I'll take on this job.

MELL. [*To* ADAM.] Everybody is so rude.

TURAI. [*Looking at script.*] All right. From where you stopped.

ALMADY. [*Glibly.*] Traitress, you have deceived me.

I have long had my suspicions. I have now in my possession the proofs. No doubt you supposed me a credulous imbecile whom it was simple to hoodwink. You thought that any story would do for me? You imagined that I was fool enough to swallow anything. Let me tell you, madame, that you are mistaken. For a long time I have suspected that there was something behind all these rides of yours with our neighbor the Marquis Jean François Gilette de la Tour d'Argent. Day after day, for hours at a time, you have made a practice of riding with him on the road from Duvernois Sur Saône to Saint Sulpice de la Grande Parmentière —and slowly at that!

ILONA. It's a lie. Who told you?

ALMADY. Silence, woman! The proofs are in my pocket. Mon Dieu, is there no gratitude in this world? When I married you, who were you? A nobody. Your father, Brigadier-General Pierre Jean Bourmond de la Seconde-Chaumière-Rambouillet, fell in battle at Grande-Lagruyère Sur Marne, and you eked out a scanty living as a seamstress at your mother's home in the village of Saint Genevieve, in the Department of Seine et Oise. So, madame! And then what happened? *I* came. I gave you name, rank, and wealth such as you had never dreamed of. You became Madame La Countess du Veyrier de la Grande

Contumace Saint Emilion. I bestowed upon you not only my estates in Pardubien-Grand-Amanoir, but also my two castles in Challenges-Debicourt de la Romanée and at Rivalieux-Quandamouzières Sur Vantera-aux Alpes Maritimes. [*He stops exhausted.*]

TURAI. Don't stop. What's wrong? [ALMADY *takes off his hat and gloves, put the whip down on the table, and, stepping out of character comes down to* TURAI.]

ALMADY. It's these damned *French names,* they're perfectly frightful.

TURAI. I don't see what we can do about it.

ALMADY. You surely don't need them all?

TURAI. They're in the script.

ALMADY. But I'll go mad trying to memorize them. Titles with six hyphens in them and names of places with a dozen 'aux' and 'de la's' and 'sur's.' And, damn it, they're all in *my* part. [*Choking with fury.*] It's deadly. At least, let's leave out that second castle.

TURAI. [*Coldly.*] My dear fellow, have you no sense of dramatic construction? If he had given her only one castle, the audience would think her perfectly justified in deceiving him. If he had given

her three, they would look on him as a purse-proud fool who didn't deserve a faithful wife. No, two is exactly the right number. You can't beat Sardou when it comes to technique. Go on please.

[Almady *goes up hopelessly and replaces his hat and gloves and takes up the whip.*]

almady. I made you a countess and a wealthy woman. And what return do I get? You betray me—yes, madame, betray me—with my best friend and nearest neighbor, the Marquis Jean François Gilette de la Tour d'Argent, lord of Perigord des Champignons and Saint Sulpice de la Grand Parmentière. [*He breaks off, and removes hat and gloves as before.*] My God, it's enough to give a fellow apoplexy.

turai. [*Surprised.*] I beg your pardon? That doesn't seem to be in the script.

almady. [*Down to* Turai *as before.*] I'm sorry. I can't help it. It's these names.

turai. Well, I'm always open to suggestions. What would *you* like to call the gentleman?

almady. Foche or Briand—or something short like that.

turai. [*Sarcastically.*] Perhaps—Vichy! Get on, please. [Almady *goes upstage more hopeless than before.*]

ILONA. [*Nervously.*] Oh, do let's get on. Count, you have said enough.

TURAI. So *he* seems to think.

ILONA. I will not endure these shameful accusations. You are insulting the woman who bears your name.

ALMADY. [*Again taking off hat and gloves and puts down the whip.*] It's a damned shame.

TURAI. What is?

ALMADY. I always have to say the whole infernal thing from beginning to end, and she just says "your name."

TURAI. [*Coldly.*] We're wasting time.

ALMADY. Another word, madame, and I produce the proof.

ILONA. [*Laughing.*] The proof? One is amused. One smiles.

ALMADY. [*Takes stage and turns.*] A smile which I will make to die upon your lips. Behold! The proof! [*He fuddles in his coat-tail pocket from which he belatedly takes the peach with a sinister flourish.*]

ILONA. [*With insincere terror.*] Ah, gracious heaven! The peach! [*Sits.*]

ALMADY. [*Lays peach on table.*] Yes, madame, the peach. The first peach that ripened on the lovingly cherished, early-blooming, richly bearing, East Indian dwarf peach trees in my orchard at Simarineux de la Pomme d'Api, making a triumphant entry into the world days ahead of any other peach in the whole of France. [*He turns and glares at* TURAI *resentfully,* TURAI *pays no attention, so he resumes his part.*] You know what a passionate fruit-grower I am. You know that I have tended this peach from its first budding—cared for it—watched over it—wrapped it about with my love—kept a diary about it—and awaited its ripening like the coming of a Messiah. And what happens? This afternoon I go out riding. I am proceeding at a gentle jog-trot—

[MELL *imitates hoof-beats as before.* ALMADY *is incensed by his stupidity.* MELL *subsides abashed, and* ALMADY *resumes.*]

I am proceeding at a gentle jog-trot from Duvernois Sur Saône to Saint Sulpice de la Grand Parmentière— [*He breaks off with an anguished look at* TURAI.]

TURAI. [*Coldly.*] Along the high road—

ALMADY. Along the high road. And whom should I see there, tripping along, but Juliette—your maid. I speak to her. She betrays embarrassment at seeing me. She stammers and ties her apron-

strings in a knot. I ask her where she is going. Terrified, she bursts into tears and whispers, 'My lady sent me to the Marquis Jean François Gilette de la Tour d'Argent'—curse him!

TURAI. Right. This time that *was* in the script.

ALMADY. Why, I ask the girl, did your mistress send you to the Marquis? And then suddenly, happening to look closer, I see that she is trying desperately to hide a little parcel from me. I take it from her, I open it, and what do I see? [*Points to peach.*] That peach! The King of Peaches, the apple of my eye—my pride and joy, my first-born, the supreme peach from the orchards of Simarineux de la Pomme d'Api—the last word in stoneless fruit which I have been guarding since birth like a baby sister— And, as if this were not enough, wrapped round that glorious specimen of its kind, I discover a letter. [*He fuddles in his inside coat-pocket, draws out a letter, sees it is the wrong one, replaces it hastily, and draws forth the proper one.*] This letter [*He reads.*] "My beloved. This is the first peace that has ripened in France this year. I send it to *you*. Eat it reverently." [*He holds the letter under her nose.*] There!

ILONA. Are you trying to make me smell it?

ALMADY. I am. For even if you were shameless

enough to deny your writing you cannot deny your perfume. Or are you proposing to deny it?

ILONA. No.

ALMADY. Ha! Then you admit it?

ILONA. Yes.

ALMADY. *You* sent him this peach?

ILONA. Yes!

ALMADY. [*Again takes off his hat and gloves. To* TURAI.] It's simply rank injustice. I've got to say yard-long speeches at the top of my voice, and all her part consists of is little exclamations like 'oh!' 'no!' and 'yes!'

TURAI. Yes—I noticed that myself. These short crisp speeches are characteristic of Sardou's women! It can't be helped. Go on, please.

ALMADY. [*Goes back, puts on hat and gloves, more miserable than ever.*] So! You accept from me everything—love, name, rank, riches, estates—*two* castles—and then you go about the place sending my most cherished fruit to your lover!

ILONA. [*Rises, tragically.*] No.

ALMADY. You have the effrontery to pretend that the Marquis is *not* your lover?

ILONA. Yes.

ALMADY. You mean he is?

ILONA. No.

ALMADY. You mean he is *not?*

ILONA. [*Triumphantly.*] Yes.

ALMADY. [*With a theatrical laugh.*] A likely story. Madame, I am a fruit-grower, the leading amateur horticulturist in France and President of the Paris Peach Club. I know—I say, I *know*—that one does not give fruit like this save where one has first given—the heart. Madame, I despise you.

ILONA. You consider conduct like mine despicable?

ALMADY. I do.

ILONA. Good! Then I have one little question to ask you. In the early Spring of this year there ripened in your orchard the first crop of white-heart cherries. To whom did you send those cherries?

ALMADY. [*Turns away embarrassed.*] To my mother. The Dowager Countess du Veyrier de la Grande Contumace Saint Emilion.

ILONA. Indeed? To your mother? Then permit me to show you something. You are not the only one who has discovered an interesting letter. [*Takes letter from table.*] Smell that! Do you recognize the perfume? [*Holds it under his nose.*]

MELL. [*To* ADAM.] What a *situation!* Sardou at his best. There's no one like him.

ILONA. The perfume is that of Mademoiselle Emilienne, première danseuse at the Folies Bergères, whom you honor with your friendship and protection.

ALMADY. How—how did you get this?

ILONA. Never mind. Always remember letters are like sped arrows. You never can tell where they are going to drop.

MELL. [*Applauds vigorously, to* ADAM.] An epigram.

ILONA. Read it, please.

ALMADY. [*Reading.*] "My dearest. This morning that doddering old idiot of a count of mine—"

ILONA. You notice how your divinity writes of you? Go on!

ALMADY. [*Reading.*] —"that doddering old idiot of a count of mine sent me a basket of cherries. Did I tell you he was a famous fruit grower? He says these are the first cherries that have ripened in France this year and he sends them to me as a token of his love. Drop in this evening, darling, and we'll eat the old fool's cherries together. Your

loving Emilienne, P. S. Ring twice as usual!" [*He sobs.*]

ILONA. You see, what you do to me, I do to you. An eye for an eye, a *tooth for a tooth*, a peach for a cherry.

ALMADY. [*Brokenly.*] Yes. It's true.

ILONA. And now, leave my garden. This very afternoon I pack my boxes and go back to my mother. And if you will question my maid you will find that I told her to hang about till you came by—to blush and stammer—and finally to give you the letter *and* the peach. [*She breaks into stage laughter.*] Ha, ha, ha! Oh, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

ALMADY. Well, I must face it. I've lost.

ILONA. You've lost *me*.

ALMADY. [*Kneeling.*] Yvonne! Don't say that. See! I beg your forgiveness on my knees . . . overlook this one false step.

ILONA. The idea! A count, and an *elderly* count—grovelling like that. [ALMADY *gets up and turns away.*] All the same, you have touched me. So I will forgive you. But you are not to get off without punishment. Firstly, I forbid you to eat this peach.

ALMADY. My God! Not that!

ILONA. [*Firmly.*] Yes.

ALMADY. So be it.

ILONA. Secondly, you will permit me to go to Paris alone—

ALMADY. [*Despairingly.*] Yvonne!

ILONA. Not a word. Either you trust me or you do not! If you *do*, I will return. If *not*, *not*.

ALMADY. Oh, heavens! And how long do you expect to stay in Paris?

ILONA. A week. [*Short pause.*]

ALMADY. [*Suddenly bursting out.*] No! I can't live without you. I worship you. I adore you. I love you as the church steeple loves the cloud that settles on its summit, only to be wafted away by the first passing breeze. I can't live without you. Not a week, not a day. Not an hour.

ILONA. Just words. [*At the word "church steeple"* Mansky *and* Adam *have exchanged a glance of utter astonishment.*]

MANSKY. [*Rises.*] But . . . but . . . but . . . Just one moment. . . . *What* was that you said?

ILONA. I beg your pardon?

TURAI. Now, listen, *please*. We can't have these inter-

ruptions. Don't pull them up the moment they've got nicely into the swing of it.

MELL. I can't wait to see how it all ends. [*To* ADAM.] Will she leave him? Or will the memory of their past love prove too strong?

MANSKY. [*Goes to* ADAM— *Aside to* ADAM.] This is devilish queer.

TURAI. Quiet, quiet, please. [*To* ALMADY.] All right. Go on. Better go back to "Not a week! Not a day! Not an hour!"

ALMADY. *Not a week! Not a day! Not an hour!*

ILONA. Just words.

ALMADY. It's the truth. I'm crazy about you. And you—you have used me up and squeezed me like a lemon, and now you want to throw me away. [*At the word "lemon"* MANSKY *and* ADAM *again exchange glances.* MANSKY *gets up, deeply agitated.*]

MANSKY. Sandor . . .

TURAI. What is it?

MANSKY. [*To* ILONA *and* ALMADY.] You'll excuse me? I have something very urgent to say to Mr. Turai. [*He crosses to* TURAI *and drags him over to the corner below the fireplace.*] Do you hear what they're saying?

TURAI. [*Feigning non-comprehension.*] How do you mean, do I hear what they're saying?

MANSKY. I mean . . . didn't those last lines sound familiar to you?

TURAI. That's right. Now you mention it. I did notice something, only I thought it was my fancy.

MANSKY. [*To* ADAM.] Come here. [MELL *tries to become a part of the whispered conference, but* ADAM *waves him away, and he withdraws upstage disconsolate.*] [*To* TURAI.] I give you my word, Sandor—those lines were syllable for syllable the ones we heard last night through the wall.

TURAI. [*Looking at script.*] By Jove, you're right. . . . This is uncanny.

MANSKY. Go on with the rehearsal, or they will be suspecting something. I want to hear some more. [MANSKY *takes hold of* ADAM'S *arm.* ADAM *is very excited. Both listen intently.*]

TURAI. Well, let's get on. "Now you want to throw me away."

ILONA. I don't want to throw you away, silly, Oh, come on, then. Come here and let me kiss that beautiful classic brow. [ALMADY *goes to her.*]

MANSKY. [*Shouting out.*] Great Heavens!

ILONA. [*Jumping.*] What's the matter?

MANSKY. [*Whispering.*] Listen, you two. They're saying word for word what we heard them say last night. Do you grasp now what they were doing last night? *Rehearsing!* Simply going through their lines.

TURAI. [*To* MANSKY.] I must admit . . . this has come upon me as a complete surprise. . . . Really, I'm quite shaken.

ADAM. Imitate *me.* If I can be perfectly calm, you can.

MANSKY. [*Pointing at* TURAI.] And he never recognized it!

ILONA. Mr. Turai! What's going on?

ALMADY. Yes. What's all the discussion about?

TURAI. [*To* ALMADY.] Well, it's like this. Mansky says—and I'm bound to say I agree with him—that for the actual performance to-night you will have to dig up a classic brow from somewhere.

ALMADY. Dig up a classic brow?

TURAI. You see, it's rather awkward. The script says . . . "Kiss that beautiful classic brow."

ALMADY. Well?

TURAI. Well, you'll have to get one somewhere.

ALMADY. [*Bitterly.*] You think my own would not be convincing?

MANSKY. My God, no!

ALMADY. It has been so described.

TURAI. In this play, yes. But, if you'll pardon my saying so, you wouldn't suggest that any woman of taste could say such a thing in *real* life?

ALMADY. [*Bitterly.*] Very good. No doubt the property man will be able to supply me with a face.

[Mell *is appalled at the prospect of having to get a "face" but he dutifully makes a notation of it in his little book.*]

TURAI. Oh—my dear fellow. [*All go back to places.*]

ADAM. [*Impatiently.*] We're wasting time. Let's get on.

TURAI. Sh! Sh! We've only a few minutes more.

ADAM. No more interruptions.

MELL. Thank God!

ILONA. Where were we? Oh, yes. Come here and let me kiss that beautiful classic brow. [*Kisses him on forehead.*]

ALMADY. That's not a kiss. That's a tip.

MANSKY. Surely that line is a trifle vulgar.

TURAI. It's vulgar because it's spoken by a vulgar man.

MANSKY. The speaker is a count.

TURAI. But a dull-witted bounder, for all that. He's the sort of man who *would* say things like that. Don't you start trying to teach Sardou how to write dialogue.

ALMADY. [*Furious.*] For God's sake, are we going to rehearse?

TURAI. Yes—go on, please.

ALMADY. That's not a kiss. That's a tip.

ILONA. Don't shout like that.

ALMADY. I will shout. I'm a squeezed lemon. That's what I am—a lemon. The whole world shall know I'm a lemon. [*Falls sobbing at her feet.*]

[MANSKY *whispers something to* ADAM. ADAM *smiles happily and whispers back. They shake hands.*]

TURAI. Please—please— What's the matter?

MANSKY. Nothing. I was merely saying to Adam that I think that word "*lemon*" is all wrong.

TURAI. I think it's excellent. Absolutely in character.

The speaker is a big lemon-and-peach man from Saint Sulpice de la Grande Parmentière, and he naturally goes to the orchard for his similes. Try to realize that he's practically an imbecile with virtually no vocabulary.

[Almady *looks up from* Ilona's *lap and registers indignation.*]

[*Prompting.*] 'Please, please'— [*To* Ilona.] From you, my dear. [*To* Almady.] You're crying. [Almady *sobs.*]

ILONA. Please, please. Don't cry. I can't bear it. You know how fond I am of you. [*She goes to table where peach is.*]

ALMADY. Those nights of love—those flaming, wonderful nights! Have you forgotten them so completely? [*He stands up, and starts to touch the peach.*]

ILONA. Stop! Control yourself.

ALMADY. [*Gazing at peach.*] You ask me to control myself—when I look at *that?* At that perfect shape. The rose flush of that skin. [*Starts to touch peach.*] Just to stroke it . . .

ILONA. Hands off.

ALMADY. [*Snatching up the peach, holds it in one hand and with the other strokes it voluptuously.*]

My God! How round it is! How smooth, how velvety—and how fragrant! [*Raises it to his mouth.*]

ILONA. You mustn't bite it. [*She snatches his hand.*]

[MANSKY gives a shriek and goes into fits *of laughter.* ADAM *stretches his arms out to* MANSKY *and roars.* ADAM *slaps* MANSKY *on the back,* MANSKY *laughing uninterruptedly.* ALMADY *turns away furiously.* ILONA *turns away, ashamed.*]

MANSKY. [*Putting his arm around* ADAM'S *shoulder, still laughing.*] Heavens! What fools we've been!

ADAM. Haven't we?

MELL. [*Eagerly.*] Won't you tell me the joke?

ADAM. You wouldn't understand.

ILONA. What are you two so amused about?

TURAI. [*Curtly.*] Come, come. We're wasting time. Let's get on.

MANSKY. Yes, get on. I want to hear this. Round, smooth, velvety and fragrant.

ADAM. And you mustn't bite.

ILONA. You mustn't bite it.

ALMADY. I must—I am so hungry.

[ADAM *and* MANSKY *go on laughing.* MELL

laughs too, but with a puzzled look, as much as to say "I'm joining in, but I really don't understand."]

ALMADY. [*Sits.*] Ah well! I see I am nothing to you any more.

ILONA. Oh, for goodness sake! I swear that no man— [*Breaks off, unable to go on.*]

TURAI. [*Prompting.*] No man who has ever come into my life . . .

ILONA. . . . has meant so much to me as you. From the top of your head to the soles of your feet you are a *man.*

TURAI. I think we might cut that last bit.

ALMADY. Why?

TURAI. Well, I mean to say . . . A *little* too *explicit*, don't you think? Rather too obvious a sexual implication. A wee bit *coarse*, perhaps, yes? We must consider the feelings of the audience. [*To* MELL.] Will there be any young girls there to-night?

MELL. Oh, yes, indeed.

TURAI. Then we must cut it. They may bring their parents. Instead suppose we say—"I love you, even though you *are* only a poor imitation of a

man." [ALMADY *registers rage.*] Go on. [*To* ALMADY.] "My God! I suffer . . ."

ALMADY. [*Bitterly.*] My God! I suffer like a sick horse. [*To* TURAI.] Look here, *that* ought to come out.

TURAI. Why?

ALMADY. How could anyone speak of himself so vulgarly?

TURAI. We went into all that just now. Just what a cattle-raiser *would* say.

ALMADY. But he's a fruit-raiser!

TURAI. Cattle, too. Cattle as a side line.

ILONA: Don't look so pathetic. . . . Well, come here. Kiss me. You donkey.

ALMADY. [*Furiously to* TURAI.] It's too much . . . Horse *and* donkey.

ADAM. [*Aside to* MANSKY.] This is where I went out. How funny it seems now.

TURAI. [*Looks at script.*] We're getting near the end now. They kiss here. [ALMADY *starts to kiss* ILONA.]

ILONA. [*Pushing him away.*] Oh, never mind the kiss. Kiss over.

ALMADY. [*Offended.*] Just as you please. I want you to remember that kiss for ever.

ILONA. Your kiss is revolting to me.

ALMADY. [*Despairingly—To* TURAI.] Does that stay in?

TURAI. My dear fellow, we can't cut everything.

ALMADY. But a line like that's so damned personal. The audience will loathe me.

MANSKY. It beats me why on earth you ever chose a part like this.

[ALMADY *looks toward* TURAI *in mute appeal, but* TURAI *is adamant and metes out no mercy.*]

TURAI. [*With subtle mockery.*] Yes. It's no business of mine, but I must say I can't understand that, either. It doesn't help to cut lines here and there. It's the whole part. The character's a bounder and a fool.

MANSKY. The author must have loathed this fellow. [To TURAI.] You notice that, Sandor, don't you?

TURAI. [*Ironically.*] Of course, I noticed it.

ILONA. Do let's get to the end. [*Rises.*] Mademoiselle Emilienne describes you as an old fool. [ALMADY *glares.*]

TURAI. [*Prompting.*] And so I am.

ALMADY. And so I am, Yvonne. [*Furious.*] So I am.

MANSKY. You certainly are.

ILONA. [*Sincerely.*] It's disgusting that a man of your age should persecute a woman, and by playing on her sense of gratitude seek to obtain a love which she would never bestow as a free gift.

ADAM. [*Crossing down to* TURAI *and whispering.*] Uncle Sandor—will you give me your word of honor that Ilona shall never know how shamefully I suspected her?

TURAI. Don't be childish.

ADAM. If ever she found out—she'd never look at me again.

TURAI. I'll never tell her.

ILONA. Please don't interrupt any more.

ADAM. [*Bows elaborately and says with meaning.*] Forgive me. [ILONA *accepts his apology with an affectionate gesture, and when his back is turned it is she who is mutely asking his forgiveness.*]

TURAI. Go on!

ILONA. Think of your wife. Think of your children.

ALMADY. [*Turns away.*] My children!

ILONA. What would your son say? Your son, a highly respected colonel in the Dragoons.

[*This is to much. The Actor in* ALMADY *is crushed. He comes down to* TURAI *brokenly and speaks supplicatingly.*]

ALMADY. Mr. Turai.

TURAI. [*Amiably.*] Yes?

ALMADY. It's just a suggestion, but couldn't we say lieutenant there?

TURAI. I'm afraid not. You see it was "general" in the text.

ALMADY. [*Wildly.*] My son a general?

ILONA. [*To* TURAI.] How far back *can* I go?

TURAI. At the most a major.

ILONA. [*Quickly.*] Very well. Your son, a highly respected major in the Dragoons.

ALMADY. You are right, Yvonne. The shock would kill him. [ALMADY *breaks off, evidently unwilling to speak his next line. But* TURAI *prompts him relentlessly.*]

TURAI. A ridiculous old petticoat-chaser.

ALMADY. [*Speaking the lines almost sotto voce in*

a casual offhand manner.] A ridiculous old petticoat-chaser, that's what I am. Bah!

TURAI. Oh, come, Mr. Almady. Not so tamely, please. More *life*. Once more.

ALMADY. [*Comes down to* TURAI *and says the line with petulance and irritation.*] A ridiculous old petticoat-chaser, that's what I am. Bah!

TURAI. [*Relentlessly.*] Still not quite strong enough. More gusto. More sincerity.

ALMADY. [*Shouts the line to relieve his fury.*] A RIDICULOUS OLD PETTICOAT-CHASER, THAT'S WHAT I AM. BAH!

TURAI. [*Coldly.*] Once more, please.

ALMADY. [*Shouting to the full limit of his vocal chords in wild desperation.*] A RIDICULOUS OLD PETTICOAT-CHASER, THAT'S WHAT I AM. BAH!

TURAI. [*With approval.*] Fine—*that's* it. Now read it that way at the performance. [ALMADY *returns upstage completely crushed and beaten.*]

ALMADY. [*Genuinely.*] I promise you I shall never again make myself obnoxious to this woman who loves another man and is sick and tired of me. Never, never again.

ILONA. [*Briskly.*] Never again?

ALMADY. [*Briskly.*] Never again.

ILONA. Then, Maurice, I will be generous. I will not go to Paris, and you may eat the peach.

ALMADY. [*Hurls himself at the peach.*] My God! At last! [*Gnaws the peach.*]

TURAI. [*Rising.*] Curtain.

MANSKY. The end?

TURAI. The end.

MANSKY. He really should have given his wife the peach. That would have made a much prettier finish.

TURAI. Oh, my dear fellow! Where's your sense of character? The man's selfish to the core. He'd never give his wife peaches.

MANSKY. A very unsympathetic part. Still, he played it well.

TURAI. It fitted him.

MELL. [*Dancing about in anguish, pointing to* Almady, *incoherent with agitation.*] Oh! Oh!

TURAI. What's the matter with you?

MELL. He's eating the peach! He's eating the peach! I never dreamed he was going to *eat* the peach. I

shall have to dash out and get another. [*He rushes off to the hall.*]

ILONA. [*Takes off scarf. To* ADAM, *who stands overcome with happiness.*] Well, how do you like me in this part?

ADAM. Oh, darling, you were wonderful, simply wonderful. And, if you want to know what I think—this little comedy is worth all Shakespeare put together. [*He kisses her hands.*]

MANSKY. Oh, no, no, no. The thing dates terribly. When did Sardou write it?

TURAI. I don't know. What period Sardou is this, Mr. Almady?

ALMADY. I should imagine it was his last work.

MANSKY. Then he must have been a very old man at the time. It's terrible. He probably wrote it just before he died.

TURAI. Or just after. [*To* ILONA.] Can I have a minute? Just a few things I'd like to tell you about your part.

ILONA. Yes, yes, I shall be very grateful. [*To* MANSKY *and* ADAM.] Go along. We shan't be a moment. [*They go up the stairs at right.*]

MANSKY. What beats me is why an actor who has always played heroes picked a part like that for himself. He must be terribly fond of acting. [Mansky *and* Adam *go out at right.*]

TURAI. [*To* Almady, *who is sitting dejectedly at left.*] You seem upset.

ALMADY. [*Miserably.*] Not at all. [*He glares at* Turai.]

TURAI. So you've decided to take the midnight express directly after the performance?

ALMADY. Yes.

TURAI. I think you're wise. A good, fruity train, highly spoken of by connoisseurs. Well, just to show you the sort of fellows we Turais are, I'll let you off the major. Ilona, you can say lieutenant.

ALMADY. Even lieutenant seems a little . . .

TURAI. Good God! We can't make him a drummer boy.

ALMADY. [*Picks up part.*] Very well. So be it. I suppose I ought to be thankful for small mercies. [*Goes toward door to hall.*]

TURAI. Where are you off to?

ALMADY. I'm going to have another go at those infernal French names. But in spite of everything —thank you. [ALMADY *bows and then goes out.*]

ILONA. [*Going to* TURAI *and embracing him.*] Sandor, you're an angel. Was it awfully difficult, writing that play?

TURAI. Oh, no. That damned peach stumped me for a while. Smooth, round, velvety and fragrant, and you mustn't bite. It wasn't easy to get round that. Believe me, there are very few things in this world that are round, smooth, velvety—and respectable.

ILONA. [*Turns head away.*] Oh—he was talking about my shoulder.

TURAI. [*With delicate irony and gazing at her shoulder, then kissing it.*] Really? I thought it was your forehead.

ILONA. You're an old devil—that's what you are.

TURAI. Just what I expected. Now that it's all over, everybody else is a gentleman and I'm an old devil. But somehow I don't think I am. My little Ilona, I have saved a young man a bad heartache. It's a negative kindness, but is there a positive one that's better? Yes, on the whole, I think I'm fairly well satisfied with myself. And there's

a little old woman looking at me from somewhere —probably from hell—and her eyes seem to be twinkling, as if she was satisfied, too. It's unfortunate, that you won't have me always on hand to . . . [*Re-enter* Mansky *and* Adam.]

MANSKY. [*On the landing, to* Adam.] Poor old Turai's feeling awfully sore about all this. He had a wonderful scheme for bringing you two together, based on what he calls psychology. And now he's furious because that won't be needed. [*Enter* Dwornitschek *from hall.*]

ADAM. Sh! Ilona will hear you. Let's drop the subject.

DWORNITSCHEK. [*Standing at center.*] Dinner is served. [Adam *meets* Ilona *at center. They embrace and kiss lovingly and go out to the hall arm in arm.*]

MANSKY. [*With self-satisfaction to* Turai.] So, my friend, it comes down to this. There are many clever writers, but the most successful of them all is still old man life himself.

TURAI. That's because he doesn't have to collaborate with you. [*He takes* Mansky's *arm. As he passes* Dwornitschek *he stops and looks at him.*]

DWORNITSCHEK. [*Smiling.*] Dwornitschek, sir.

TURAI. Still Dwornitschek— Thank you.

DWORNITSCHEK. Thank *you*, sir.

TURAI. No, no, my dear Dwornitschek, thank YOU.
[TURAI *and* MANSKY *go out.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS